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HILDA CRANE

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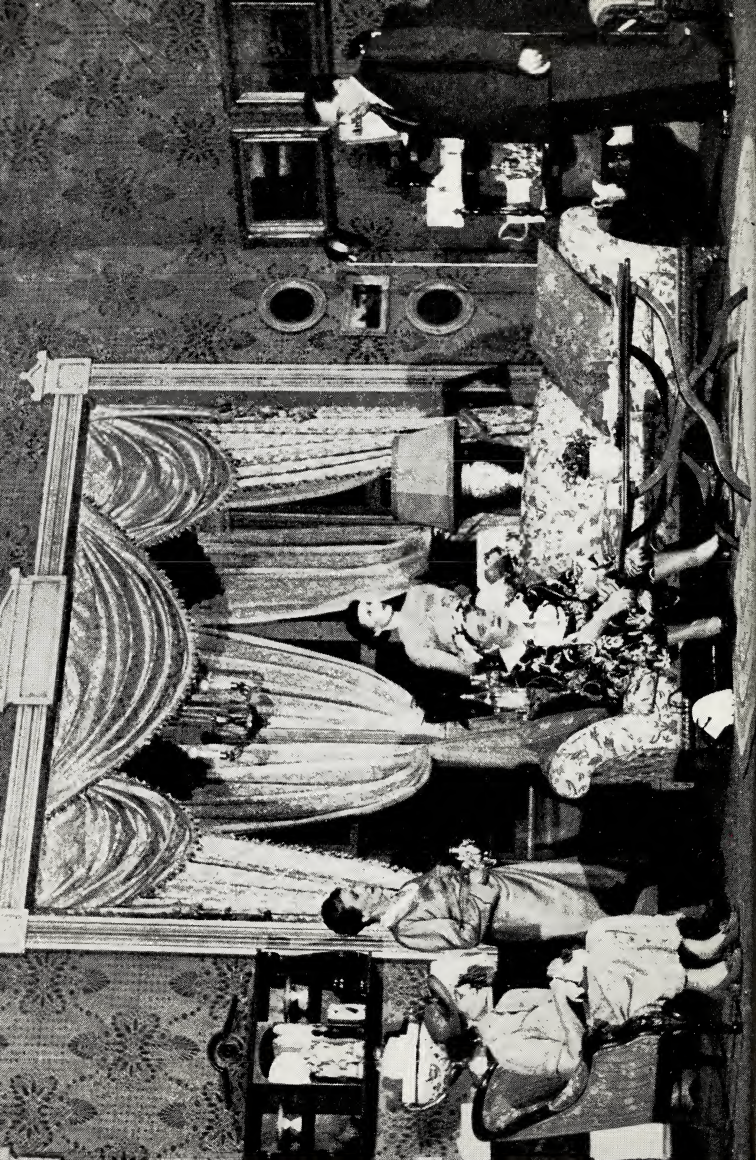
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SKYLARK

JASON





# *Hilda Crane*

*A DRAMA*

BY SAMSON RAPHAELSON



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FIRST PRINTING

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*For*  
ARTHUR SCHWARTZ, JESSICA TANDY  
AND HUME CRONYN





*HILDA CRANE was first presented by Arthur Schwartz at the Coronet Theatre, New York City, on November 1, 1950, with the following cast:*

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

CLARA	Ann Sullivan
HENRY OTTWELL	John Alexander
MRS. CRANE	Beulah Bondi
HILDA CRANE	Jessica Tandy
MRS. OTTWELL	Evelyn Varden
PROF. CHARLES JENSEN	Frank Sundstrom
NELL BROMLEY	Eileen Heckart
DINK BROMLEY	Richard McMurray
MRS. NORDLINGER	Madeleine King
MR. NORDLINGER	Watson White
MISS KEAVNEY	Frieda Altman

*Directed by Hume Cronyn*  
*Production designed by Howard Bay*  
*Costumes supervised by Harriett Ames*

## SCENES

### ACT ONE

SCENE I.—Mrs. Crane's living room, Winona, Illinois.  
Mid-afternoon, April.

SCENE II.—The same. Later that afternoon.

### ACT TWO

SCENE I.—The same. Two months later.  
8:30 on a June evening.

SCENE II.—The same. The following afternoon.

### ACT THREE

SCENE I.—The Ottwells' living room.

A Sunday afternoon in June, two years later.

SCENE II.—The same. Late that night.

## ACT ONE



## ACT ONE

### SCENE I

*Winona, Illinois. Living room in the home of MRS. CRANE—a comfortable but not sumptuous home which MRS. CRANE's parents built and furnished, still bearing the stamp of Victorianism.*

*A stairway comes down into the living room. The front door is at the foot of the stairway. There is an open archway leading into the dining room. Through the window we glimpse trees and the houses on the other side of a small-town street. It is about four in the afternoon of an April day.*

*As the curtain rises, the doorbell rings. CLARA, a raw-boned woman who is "the help," comes from the rear of the house and opens the door.*

CLARA

Oh, hello, Mr. Ottwell.

*(HENRY OTTWELL comes in. He is a substantial man of forty-three, physically rugged and somewhat heavy. Once a mechanic, he now owns a lawn-mower factory and considerable other property. His clothes are high-priced, but his taste is definitely not that of Fifth Avenue. The suit and the light topcoat are of patterns and colors which a "discriminating" man wouldn't be caught dead in. He is not a man any woman would look at twice from a romantic point of view, but he is decent, modest and able. At the moment, he is uncharacteristically tense but trying to behave with composure.)*

## HILDA CRANE

HENRY

Good afternoon, Clara. Mrs. Crane is expecting me.

CLARA

Yes, Mr. Ottwell.

MRS. CRANE

*(Upstairs)*

Is that you, Henry?

HENRY

Yes, Mrs. Crane.

MRS. CRANE

I'm coming right down.

CLARA

Can I help you with your coat?

HENRY

I think I can handle that myself, Clara.

*(CLARA goes. HENRY removes his topcoat and hat. The next moment MRS. CRANE comes down. She is a well-bred American small-town mother, neat, composed, old-fashioned, pleasantly severe.)*

Hello, Mrs. Crane.

MRS. CRANE

*(Cordially)*

How are you, Henry?

*(They shake hands.)*

HENRY

I'm sorry I'm late, but I was delayed at the factory.

MRS. CRANE

Well, Hilda isn't home yet, so we can talk a little. She's gone for a walk on the campus—it's such a lovely day.

HENRY

Yes, it is. . . . I'm only going to stay for a moment. (*Taking a letter from his pocket*) I came to leave this letter for Hilda.

MRS. CRANE

(*With sudden attentiveness*)

Well—sit down, Henry.

HENRY

(*Still standing; with dignity*)

It's a letter of proposal.

MRS. CRANE

(*This is a momentous piece of news. As she sits*)

Would you like a cup of tea?

HENRY

No, thank you. (*Uneasily*) I guess I ought to say it to her face. But I never proposed to anybody before, and there are so many things I might leave out. Being a businessman, I felt safer if I put it all in writing.

MRS. CRANE

That's understandable.

HENRY

And then there's another angle. If I propose to her in person, and she says no, that would be the end of it. But this way, with a letter, she has time to think, to reconsider.

MRS. CRANE

It's very sound, Henry.

HENRY

Do you think I have a chance?

MRS. CRANE

*(Thoughtfully)*

Yes, Henry. I think you have a chance.

HENRY

*(With a serious, questioning look)*

Has she confided in you?

MRS. CRANE

Not exactly. But I sense a difference in her.

HENRY

*(Anxiously—sitting beside her on the sofa)*

Could you maybe put it into words?

MRS. CRANE

No, I couldn't, Henry. She and I are still strangers to each other. After all, I've seen her only three times in the past eleven years. I disapproved of her first husband, and I never even met her second. . . .

HENRY

*(With a touch of impatience, putting his hand on hers)*

Yes, yes. But what makes you think I have . . . ?

MRS. CRANE

What makes *you* think you have a chance, Henry? I know you. We've lived in this town all our lives, and you're nobody's fool. You never proposed before.



HENRY

I'll tell you. When I looked her up in New York this winter—you remember, I took her to dinner.

MRS. CRANE

Yes.

HENRY

I didn't like the appearance of that apartment house she lived in. It was kind of shabby. And yet—she did have a nice little job. . . .

MRS. CRANE

She hasn't got it any more.

HENRY

I know; she quit. But there's a much better one waiting for her.

MRS. CRANE

I'm not so sure about that.

HENRY

*(Intently)*

Tell me what you know.

MRS. CRANE

Oh, little things she gives away about herself, bits of information I've received in letters . . . I think you and I understand each other, Henry. . . . If she has any sense, she'll jump at you.

HENRY

Well, that's going too far the other way. Look at her—and look at me. I hope you realize how deep my feelings are about

her. When she was a high-school kid, she came to my little repair shop and I sold her a bicycle. I've cared for no one else from that day on. (*The telephone rings. As MRS. CRANE goes to answer*) If that's my mother, do you mind telling a little white lie and say I've just left?

MRS. CRANE

(*Into the telephone*)

Hello. . . . Yes, Mrs. Ottwell. . . . Why, he just . . .

HENRY

(*Quickly*)

Excuse me—I'll talk to her. Might as well face it. (*Taking the telephone—firmly*) Mother . . . I'm just leaving . . . Yes, I've given the letter to Mrs. Crane. . . . Most decidedly, Mother . . . No, I'm going to the factory now. . . . I'll see you this evening. Good-bye, Mother.

(*He hangs up.*)

MRS. CRANE

I was wondering about her. Naturally, I've heard a good deal about your mother.

HENRY

No matter what people say, I live my own life.

MRS. CRANE

I admire you very much, Henry. (*Looking out the window*) Hilda's coming! (*He looks uncomfortable*) Why don't you go out the back way?

HENRY

(*Hesitating—with dignity*)

I feel a little foolish. Maybe I should wait.

MRS. CRANE

Just as you wish.

HENRY

*(After a moment's pause, quickly gets his hat and coat)*

I guess the letter should talk for itself.

MRS. CRANE

*(As he hastens across the room)*

I think it will.

HENRY

*(Turning to her in the dining-room opening)*

Good-bye—and thanks.

*(HENRY goes. MRS. CRANE drops the letter on the coffee-table. The next moment HILDA CRANE comes in. She is thirty-three, attractive. There is intelligence in her face, and credulity, and romantic eagerness, and a hint of bitterness. She wears a mink coat over a dress of most expensive simplicity. She unknots the silk scarf from around her head as she enters.)*

HILDA

*(Blithely)*

What a day! The campus is white with snow, and the students are just back from the Easter holidays. . . . I felt as if I were a freshman all over again! *(As she takes off her mink coat—ruefully)* The lining is worn, but the fur is still beautiful, isn't it? *(Going to the clothes closet under the stairway)* Do you know whom I ran into? My old beau, Charlie Jensen.

MRS. CRANE

Here's a letter for you.

HILDA

*(Taking out a coat hanger)*

I didn't exactly run into him. I went to his office. . . . Imagine, I thought he still had the little cubbyhole he used to share with three other instructors. I forgot he's a professor now.

*(She hangs up the coat.)*

MRS. CRANE

It's an important letter, I believe.

HILDA

A tall, clean-cut boy and a lovely girl in flat-heeled shoes . . . Gosh, they're young! They're children, aren't they? Anyway, they sent me to a corner suite. And just as I reached the door, it opened and out stepped Associate Professor Charles J. Jensen.

MRS. CRANE

*(Impatiently)*

The letter.

HILDA

Oh, yes. *(She takes the letter from her mother, flips the sheets to the last page, goes to a chair)* Who the heck is this from, anyway?

MRS. CRANE

Henry Ottwell.

HILDA

Five pages. It can't be a date—he could always pick up the telephone. . . .

*(She sits.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(Picking up her knitting)*

Why don't you read it?

HILDA

You know, Mama, he's been rushing me like a schoolboy.  
. . . How old do you think he is, anyway—fifty?

MRS. CRANE

He's a young man—he's only ten years older than you.

HILDA

Do you know where Charlie and I went? All the way out  
past the new Agricultural Building. *(Tenderly)* Charlie has  
hardly changed at all.

MRS. CRANE

He always seemed sallow and underfed to me.

HILDA

*(Smiling as her mother begins knitting)*

He still is. It's most becoming.

MRS. CRANE

What's becoming about a middle-aged professor?

HILDA

When it's a professor, he's middle-aged at thirty-seven, and  
when it's a rich man, he's young at forty-three, eh, Mama?

MRS. CRANE

That's not as absurd as you meant it to be.

HILDA

*(Dreamily, putting down the letter)*

Charlie is sweet. He's just as simple and innocent as when we used to hold hands and walk on the south campus. What a talk we had! We picked up where we left off eleven years ago. Freud and Kafka, T. S. Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and Cole Porter . . . I think that's what I came home for. That . . . *(Glancing at a comfortable, worn armchair)* The memory of Papa—my old room with my old bed in it—and you, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

I'm happy to hear that. I hope you can stay on for a long time.

HILDA

*(Returning to the letter)*

Oh, my, wouldn't I like to! But I have that new job waiting in New York . . . *(Her attention is suddenly held by the letter. She reads a moment in silence. She looks up, oddly moved)* He wants to marry me!

MRS. CRANE

That shouldn't surprise you.

HILDA

He has loved me ever since I was seventeen and came to his little bicycle shop. "Between the day when you ordered the bicycle and the day you called for it, your father had died. How gay you were the first time, and how sad the second time!" . . . Such a nice guy!

MRS. CRANE

Dependable.

HILDA

"Eleven years ago I would have been making a fool of myself to aspire for you. But now—I have built a lawn-mower factory from a single lawn-mower. I have developed property. I hope when you get to know me better, you'll realize that none of these things were accidents."

MRS. CRANE

He means the achievement, not the money.

HILDA

*(Slowly, feelingly)*

"Regardless of your two divorces, I consider you a very moral person. The fact remains that I have loved no other but you, and never will." *(Disturbed)* You know, I think any woman, unless she's frivolous and stupid, would be moved by a proposal—any woman, no matter who the man is. . . .

MRS. CRANE

I like you in this mood.

HILDA

This letter frightens me. It's like being on a desert island, and suddenly a ship comes along. The ship may not be going where you want to go, and it may not be flying your flag, but there you are. *(Facing her mother)* I'm on a desert island, Mama—did you know?

MRS. CRANE

It was obvious that you didn't come home for a rest from the wonderful life in New York.

HILDA

Then you didn't believe I quit my job?

MRS. CRANE

I doubted it.

HILDA

*(With a touch of bitterness and extravagance)*

They dispensed with my services. Assistant buyers at fifty a week are easy to hire and easy to fire. . . . And that offer I bragged about—the fabulous offer . . . What did I say—advertising manager of a cosmetics company? You knew I was lying at once, didn't you? . . . *How* did you know?

MRS. CRANE

You're wearing the same clothes you wore when you came here after your divorce. They're beautiful clothes, but they're exactly the same, and that was two years ago.

HILDA

Do you imagine Henry knows?

MRS. CRANE

What's the difference? The important thing is that Henry is a substantial man, an admirable man . . .

HILDA

*(Quickly, intensely)*

Don't! Hold it, Mama. Let it hang in the air for a while. . . . *(Sitting on the sofa beside her mother—with gravity)* Shall we get acquainted with each other, Mama?

MRS. CRANE

I think it's about time.



HILDA

*(With a little lonely smile)*

It just occurs to me that if I put my head in your lap, you'd be the most surprised person in the world.

MRS. CRANE

You want to be a child again.

HILDA

I don't recall resting my head in your lap, ever.

MRS. CRANE

Still, you want to be a child again, don't you?

HILDA

Maybe. Yes, I do! Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen. Papa in that chair, smoking his cigar, looking at me the way most people looked at me in those days. That exceptional, remarkable, gifted Hilda Crane! *(She faces her father's chair and she speaks as though he were sitting in it)* And I say to him, "Is that the way it should be, Papa? Live like a man, and still be a woman? Get a job, pay your own way, and lick the world?" And he smiles and says, "Why not? The future belongs to you, Hilda." That's where I'd like to stop it and change it! *Right there!* *(She springs up, going to the chair)* I want to turn on him. "No, Papa—no!" *(Returning to her mother, sitting beside her)* And I want you to put your knitting down and tell me what you're thinking—what you've never told me, not to this day.

MRS. CRANE

I did tell you, a hundred times. But you never listened.

HILDA

I'm listening now. I want to learn. . . . You've always known right from wrong, haven't you?

MRS. CRANE

Doesn't everyone?

HILDA

Here you are with your knitting, your church-going, your committees, and you're happy. Give me something to believe in. What's your secret, Mama?

MRS. CRANE

I taught you that there is a God. I made you learn your Bible. But you didn't want God. You wanted to be "free." Your father wanted you to be "free." Well, God didn't—and He still doesn't.

HILDA

Doesn't He? . . . You mean I should have had no job, one husband and lots of children.

MRS. CRANE

That's exactly what I mean.

HILDA

And yet there are so many women who have it both ways. They go from one job to another until they find the right one, and then they hang onto it. And they have one husband after another, and they end up with the right husband, job, children —*and* God.

MRS. CRANE

Show me such a woman. Where is she?

HILDA

*(Rising, turning away in distress, suddenly facing  
her mother)*

I'm awfully mixed up, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

*(Handing her the letter)*

Why don't you read this again?

HILDA

*(Letter in hand)*

I wonder . . . Is it possible to live with a man you don't love, to go to bed with him, year in year out—a man you respect and like . . . ?

MRS. CRANE

You put things in a very outlandish way sometimes, Hilda.

HILDA

*(After a pause)*

Mama, have you ever wanted to go to sleep? Just empty a bottle of pills and really say good night . . . ?

MRS. CRANE

No, and I've never wanted to sit on a flagpole, either.

HILDA

*(Suddenly laughing)*

Oh, Mama! Mama, we've had a wonderful talk. It was swell.

MRS. CRANE

You've just closed a door on me, haven't you?

HILDA

Not really, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

I didn't mean to sound disapproving.

HILDA

*(Gently)*

Don't try so hard, Mama. We'll get together.

MRS. CRANE

In fact, some day I'll . . . I know something about—love and—marriage. Some day I may find a way of—telling it to you.

HILDA

*(Genuinely)*

I'll be terribly interested. *(The doorbell rings. Her face brightening)* I'll take it. It might be Charlie Jensen—he said he'd be passing this way, and I told him to drop in. *(To CLARA, who appears in the dining-room doorway)* Never mind, Clara. *(CLARA goes. HILDA runs quickly and sits beside her mother on the sofa. In a lowered tone)* If it's Charlie, be nice to him, please. You didn't used to be. Will you?

MRS. CRANE

Of course!

*(HILDA starts toward door, stops for a quick glance in the mirror of the hall-tree, then opens the door.)*

HILDA

*(Obviously not recognizing the woman who appears in the doorway)*

How do you do?

MRS. CRANE

*(Instantly)*

Mrs. Ottwell, I believe! *(She promptly goes to greet the woman)* Do come in!

*(HILDA looks with a touch of consternation at MRS. OTT-  
WELL, who enters. A heavy, coarse woman, somewhat  
overdressed, bejeweled, and wearing an expensive seal-  
skin coat.)*

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Hostile, aggressive, yet not sure of herself)*

I was just breakin' in my new car, so I thought I'd stop by and say hello.

MRS. CRANE

This is a pleasure, indeed. Have you met my daughter?

HILDA

*(Cordially)*

How do you do, Mrs. Ottwell? It's nice to see you.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Accepting HILDA's hand, looking her over with the  
scarcely concealed sharpness of hatred)*

Likewise.

MRS. CRANE

Let me have your coat.

MRS. OTTWELL

I'd rather wear it. It's Henry's Christmas present. Like to show it off.

*(She goes to the sofa and sits.)*

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Going to the dining-room doorway, calls:)*

Clara!

HILDA

*(Simply and sweetly)*

It's a beautiful coat, Mrs. Ottwell.

MRS. OTTWELL

It's real Alaska sealskin.

HILDA

Of course!

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Gruffly but not offensively)*How would *you* know?

HILDA

*(Slightly taken aback, amused)*I—I don't really, but you get so you *think* you know.*(CLARA appears in the dining-room doorway.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(To MRS. OTTWELL)*

Which would you prefer—tea or a drink?

MRS. OTTWELL

No, thanks. I don't want anything. And liquor ain't good for my blood-pressure.

*(At a nod from MRS. CRANE, CLARA goes.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(As she moves to the sofa and sits beside MRS. OTTWELL)*

Well, what a pleasant surprise!

MRS. OTTWELL

*(With a nervous smile)*

Now, don't kid me—this ain't a surprise. You know why I'm here. *(A little guiltily)* Mind you, my son don't know I came. But I don't see why I shouldn't come. I'm his mother. . . . He wrote a certain letter today and he brought it here—didn't he?

HILDA

*(Sitting)*

Yes, he did.

MRS. OTTWELL

I ain't aimin' to make no trouble, but I guess I got a right to get acquainted with folks he's interested in. I got that right, ain't I?

MRS. CRANE

You certainly have. I was just remarking to Hilda how strange life is. Here I am—born in a small town, only 30,000 population—and yet there are hundreds of lovely people whom I've never met.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Drily)*

Well, it's nice that you met Henry, anyway.

MRS. CRANE

*(Blandly)*

And now that I've met you, I wish it had happened before. Of course, Henry has told us about you—and I've heard about you from other people. . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

I can imagine.

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Quickly)*

Only the most complimentary things, I assure you! How you brought Henry up from childhood—how you sacrificed for him.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Caught a little)*

Is that what people say?

HILDA

Oh, yes. Everybody knows that.

MRS. OTTWELL

It's the truth. I live for nothin' but that boy.

MRS. CRANE

Yes, I've heard what a wonderful mother you are. You were left a widow when Henry was quite young, weren't you?

MRS. OTTWELL

Widow, hell. Mind you, I was married. The fella was a truck driver. He run out on me when Henry was seven, and nobody seen nothin' of him to this day.

HILDA

*(Sincerely)*

How tragic for you!

MRS. OTTWELL

Good riddance, I say. I had Henry, didn't I? The boy took care of me— *(With fierce pride)* and I took care of him, too. I had my own hamburger stand—I put him through high school. . . .



MRS. CRANE

And a splendid job you made of it, Mrs. Ottwell.

MRS. OTTWELL

Yeah! (*She leans back arrogantly*) Now suppose I ask you a few questions. . . . You own this house, don't you?

MRS. CRANE

(*Helpless, polite*)

I do.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Glancing toward the window*)

That old Chevy out there, is that yours?

MRS. CRANE

Yes.

MRS. OTTWELL

Any other property?

MRS. CRANE

No.

MRS. OTTWELL

Just a small income from your husband's estate, I hear.

MRS. CRANE

Why, yes.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Turning to HILDA*)

You been married and divorced two times—that right?

HILDA

*(With poise and grave good humor)*

That's right.

MRS. OTTWELL

How come you got no children?

HILDA

*(Thinking it out)*

I don't know. . . . There are so many things a woman thinks she has to do, and she keeps on postponing . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

You got a mink coat, I hear.

HILDA

I have.

MRS. OTTWELL

Got anything beside what's on your back?

HILDA

*(After a pause—gently)*

Now look, Mrs. Ottwell. I'm sure you don't mean to be rude, but you sound rude. You're trying to find out certain things because you love your son, and you don't want him to make any mistakes. Well, you haven't asked me whether I intend to marry Henry or not. If I don't intend to marry him, then your questions do become a little impertinent.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Sardonically)*

You mean to tell me you're gonna turn down a proposition like my Henry?

HILDA

I was considering that. My inclination is to say no. But I want to think it over.

MRS. OTTWELL

Especially his bank account! (*Hastily*) Excuse me if I sound like I'm tryin' to pick a fight. I don't mean it that way. I'm just tryin' to talk turkey.

HILDA

(*Quietly, carefully and with honesty*)

Naturally I'm aware that Henry is wealthy. But what I really thought about is how kind he is, how good he is. And especially how much he seems to care for me.

MRS. OTTWELL

A man can get over that.

HILDA

That's very true.

MRS. OTTWELL

Henry's taken girls out before—and his heart ain't been broken yet.

HILDA

Was he serious about them?

MRS. OTTWELL

He mighta been—but then I talked a little sense into him.

HILDA

Have you talked sense to him about me?

MRS. OTTWELL

I ain't rightly had a chance. It all come so sudden. (*In pain*)  
And he done it behind my back.

MRS. CRANE

I'm sure Henry didn't mean to. He has the greatest respect for you, Mrs. Ottwell. But, on the other hand, when our children grow up . . .

HILDA

I don't know. Maybe Henry *is* a little afraid of having it out with his mother. . . . (*With great simplicity*) Mrs. Ottwell, you can be a great help to me. Suppose you go home and do everything in your power—everything—just as you did with the other girls—to keep Henry from seeing me again. If you succeed, I'll be relieved. But if Henry still wants to marry me—if he repeats what's in his letter, that his whole life depends on me—then I shall have a problem.

(*There is a moment of silence.*)

MRS. OTTWELL

I mustn't get excited. I always tell Henry I mustn't get excited. I got high blood-pressure, and it ain't good for me. . . . I need a little air. (*Rising*) Well, this has been a real nice visit.

HILDA

(*Genuinely concerned*)

Maybe I'd better walk out to your car with you.

MRS. OTTWELL

Oh, I'm all right. (*Looking at them both, a touch of pleading in her arrogance*) I don't think I said nothin'—well, I mean, if you should be talkin' to Henry—I don't think you could say I was impolite or anything—do you think?

MRS. CRANE

*(With dignity)*

You're always welcome here, Mrs. Ottwell. I think that's a sufficient answer.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Doubtfully)*

I'll say. . . . Well, so long—and thanks.

*(HILDA opens door for her.)*

MRS. CRANE

I'm so glad you came over.

MRS. OTTWELL

Good-bye.

MRS. CRANE and HILDA

Good-bye.

*(MRS. OTTWELL goes. HILDA closes the door after her. MRS. CRANE goes to the window and watches for a moment in silence. Then:)*

MRS. CRANE

I am glad she came. . . . *(Turning to HILDA)* There were a few moments when I was rather terrified, but, looking back at it, I think you behaved splendidly.

HILDA

*(In a strange mood)*

Do you?

MRS. CRANE

Splendidly!

HILDA

Mama . . .

MRS. CRANE

Yes?

HILDA

Would you mind very much if I left for New York this afternoon?

MRS. CRANE

If you—what?

HILDA

I could pack a few bags, and Clara could send my trunk in a day or two.

MRS. CRANE

*(Staring at her)**Why, Hilda?*

HILDA

*(In distress)*

I don't belong in this town.

MRS. CRANE

I don't know what you're talking about! You've just shown that you can behave like a grown woman—with dignity, with courage. You left that creature without a leg to stand on.

HILDA

I couldn't go through anything like it again.

MRS. CRANE

You won't have to.

## HILDA

I don't want to marry Henry Ottwell. It's all insane. . . . I don't know what I'm doing here! There's a whole world around me. Why do I act as if I'm about to become middle-aged any day, any minute, any second! . . . Yes, I'm going! . . . Now, let's see . . . (*Her mother watches her in silence. Going to the telephone*) I'll call Charlie and tell him good-bye—his office number is University 7-2. (*As she dials*) It would have been nice to see Charlie some more. It was all Shelley and ice-cream sodas. . . . (*Into the telephone*) Charlie! I'm so glad I found you in! (*Her voice is almost tremulous*) Oh, were you? . . . Yes, of course, I'd *love* to see you. . . . I'll be in all afternoon—come soon! I don't consider you impulsive at all—I consider you inspired. . . . Good-bye. (*She hangs up. Her hand remains on the telephone as though she were reluctant to let CHARLIE go*) Do you mind if I don't leave until tomorrow?

## MRS. CRANE

(*Still watching her*)

Of course not.

## HILDA

I should say good-bye to Nell Bromley, too. Her little boy has a birthday tomorrow—I must remember to get something for him. . . . (*With an effort to speak lightly*) I think Charlie still likes me. He's civilized, but he's not sophisticated and nasty. (*Her tension beginning to show*) Some men are. Especially in New York. (*Very strong emotion rising in her*) I don't want to go back to New York. . . . I can't. (*To herself, quietly, extravagantly*) What other cities are there? What's the matter with Cincinnati? Or Baltimore? (*Turning to her mother, fighting for self-control*) The day I left New York—I had a lunch engagement that day. I was waiting in the Algonquin lobby for the man. Suddenly I heard his voice. He

was standing near me but didn't see me. He was talking to another man—a man I had known rather well. And I heard the other man say, "Listen—she may be a tramp, but you've got to pretend. You have to treat her like a lady." I didn't wait to find out whom they were talking about. I got up and got out, went to my hotel and packed. I took the first train headed for Illinois. (*With a strained little smile*) And here I am.

MRS. CRANE

(*Looking at her with mingled emotions*)

I think you'd better stay a while. . . .

HILDA

Thanks, Mama.

*Curtain*



## ACT ONE

### SCENE II

*Same as Scene One. A half hour later. It is a little darker outside. The room has been tidied. A tray with drinks is on the table behind the sofa.*

*The doorbell rings. HILDA comes quickly down the stairs.*

HILDA

*(Over her shoulder)*

It's Charlie, Mama. . . . Never mind, Clara. I'll take it. *(HILDA is now at the foot of the stairs. She pauses, gathering herself. Quickly she smooths her stockings. Then she hastens to the wall mirror, where she makes sure her hair is right. She reaches the door just as the bell rings a second time, opens it. Warmly:)* Hello, Charlie! I thought you were never coming!

*(CHARLIE JENSEN comes in. He is thirty-seven, tall, thin. He is definitely attractive.)*

CHARLIE

*(Taking off his coat)*

I ran into the Dean of the Graduate School, and it was a fine chance to get in a few licks, so I walked a couple of blocks with him.

HILDA

*(Radiantly, taking his coat and hanging it on the hall-tree).*

Would you like a drink?

CHARLIE

Not now, thank you. (*Looking around*) You know, I don't think anything has changed in this room.

HILDA

(*Amused*)

Don't you? Well, the curtains are new.

CHARLIE

And this sofa used to be by the fireplace.

HILDA

That's right! Did you have a satisfactory talk with the Dean?

CHARLIE

Not very. I want a bigger appropriation for my research on Shelley.

HILDA

(*Looking at him delightedly*)

Time has stopped!

CHARLIE

How do you mean?

HILDA

When I last saw you eleven years ago, you were working on Shelley. And you still are.

CHARLIE

I'm almost ready to write the book now.

HILDA

*(Sitting in an armchair)*

Have you made up your mind whether he was an angel or a cad?

CHARLIE

It's a question of emphasis. One can say how could such a cad be an angel—or how could such an angel be a cad.

HILDA

And what have you decided, Charlie?

CHARLIE

*(After a pause, sitting on the sofa)*

Is this going to be a little tea party, where we talk about my work, and then you tell me about New York, and then I say, "It was so nice to see you after all these years"—because that's not what I came for.

HILDA

*(Sweetly)*

What did you come for, Charlie?

CHARLIE

There was something about you this afternoon . . .

*(He hesitates.)*

HILDA

*(Leaning toward him)*

Was there, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Maybe I'm wrong.

HILDA

You're not wrong. That walk with you today had more meaning for me than five years of one marriage, two years of another, and all the years between and after.

CHARLIE

*(With a smile of bitterness)*

We had walks like that in the old days. And you talked like that, too.

HILDA

I was a baby then.

CHARLIE

That's what I thought. So I held your hand and recited poetry, and waited. And then along came a football player—*(He enunciates the word with contempt)*—who didn't think you were a baby at all.

HILDA

*(Feeling for him and for herself)*

Did you really want me, Charlie?

CHARLIE

What the hell do you think?

HILDA

I wish you had done something about it.

CHARLIE

Well, *he* did.

HILDA

And I married him. He was young, he was beautiful, he married me—and he's nothing in my memory. And you're something.

CHARLIE

You came to Winona three times in the last eleven years, and you never called me.

HILDA

I thought about you.  
(*Pause.*)

CHARLIE

Why did you divorce him?

HILDA

Which one?

CHARLIE

The football player.

HILDA

(*Thinking, struggling*)

Because I, because we, believed in love.

CHARLIE

You mean desire.

HILDA

Aren't they the same?

CHARLIE

That's a schoolgirl question.

HILDA

Then schoolgirls have more courage than most women, who settle for three meals a day and love once a month.

CHARLIE

Do you really think that way—still?

HILDA

*(A little sadly)*

Don't ask me, Charlie. I don't know what I think right now.

CHARLIE

So the football player ceased to thrill you, and you walked out.

HILDA

*(Very simply)*

Yes. It was a gentleman's agreement. The ceremony was a convenience. We considered marriage a love affair. Whichever one it was over for was free to shake hands and call it a day. . . . It was all right that first year in Chicago. I was the happy wife of a promising young broker. Then he became a flyer. After the war—well, it was just one of those things.

CHARLIE

And the second—the publisher—what was the matter with him?

HILDA

Nothing. He was New York—he taught me a lot about books, and paintings. But *he* believed in love, too—and when he found one of his lady authors more exciting than me, I stepped out. He very kindly offered alimony, and I very naturally refused it.

CHARLIE

*(Studying her with something close to hatred)*

You have, as they say, lived, haven't you?

HILDA

Does it show on my face, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yes.

*(This is a blow.)*

HILDA

*(Moving toward the tray)*

Let me give you a highball.

CHARLIE

Sit down, will you? (HILDA *sits*) You're still very attractive—for me, still the most attractive woman I ever knew.

HILDA

*(Rising)*

That's nice—and I think I'd like a highball.

CHARLIE

*(Joining her)*I'll have one, too—let me help you. *(As he helps her mix the drinks)* I want to say something. I'm not going to say it romantically. . . . Ice?

HILDA

Lots of it, please.

CHARLIE

I think I must have stayed in love with you, in a very special way, all this time. I didn't know it. I thought I got over it. But

I saw you last week in the Van Buren Hotel lunching with whosis, the lawn-mower guy—and since then I haven't had a moment's peace. (*Pouring*) Say when.

HILDA

Oh, that's much too much.

CHARLIE

I'll take it. (*Handing her the bottle*) You pour your own. (*As she does*) Looking back on it, I was upset every time you visited Winona. But I didn't see you, and that made it easier. But when I met you today . . . Soda?

HILDA

Please.

(*By now the drinks are ready.*)

CHARLIE

Would you rather I didn't talk this way?

HILDA

I wish you'd go on and never stop.

CHARLIE

Just exactly how do you feel about me?

HILDA

I don't know. It's probably an illusion. You're the campus in spring, you're me at twenty and twenty-one. You're Shelley.

CHARLIE

Well, here's how. (*They both drink. Glass in hand, moving to the sofa*) I'll tell you how I feel about you. (*He sits*) Come and sit beside me. You're a very honest woman, and I think



you have a little honesty coming from me. . . . Come over here. (*Watchfully, HILDA sits beside him*) I had a bad time. You see, the whole thing was a blow to my manhood. I began running after women then. As a matter of fact, in London during the war I got married—married in London and divorced in New York. You see, she wasn't you.

HILDA

(*Setting her drink on the coffee-table, head turned away*)  
Go on, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(*Trying to make it light, but not succeeding*)

Well, through the years, I was never quite able to escape from a dream of triumph over you. . . . It was a schoolboy dream, of course. I visualized it something like this. Time: Very soon. My book on Shelley is both a scholarly and a popular success. I arrive in New York, a celebrity. And I meet you, fashionable, wealthy . . . (*A touch of small-town envy*) Was your second husband very rich, by the way?

HILDA

Medium.

CHARLIE

You're still beautiful, but you're disillusioned with your second-rate life. We have a champagne dinner, and then we come up to my hotel suite. We go to bed together. (*The bitterness rising in him*) At dawn the next day, when you leave, you are aware that eleven years ago you made the most tragic mistake of your life. (*Rising, moving away; almost violently*) But I—I yawn, turn over in bed and sleep, having forgotten even your name.

HILDA

*(After a pause, leaning over and picking up her drink; hurt for him and for herself)*

And is that what you came for, Charlie—instead of the little tea party?

CHARLIE

That's what I want.

HILDA

*(Studying the glass in her hand)*

And—is it what you saw in my face—when we were walking in the April snow, is that what you saw?

CHARLIE

I thought so.

HILDA

You were pretty close. You saw a dream in my face. It was a little different from what you imagined. But it was just as juvenile as your dream about me. I'll tell it to you—and then we'll have a drink and you'll go, won't you?

CHARLIE

Whatever you say.

HILDA

*(Contemplating her glass again, not looking at him)*

I dreamed that you'd see me as the girl I was once. That's how I saw you—as the young instructor. . . . And when we talked on the telephone today, I dreamed that we would look at each other, and all the years would fade, and within minutes, seconds, you would ask me to marry you, and I would say yes. And we'd elope then and there, and live happily ever after. *(She puts her glass down untouched. She gets*

*up, smiling*) Now, dear Charlie, kiss me and say good-bye. (CHARLIE *takes her in his arms, pauses, then kisses her lightly. He looks at her smiling face a moment, then kisses her again, deeply. She suddenly turns out of the kiss, a little breathless*) Why, Charlie! . . . You'd better say good-bye quick!

CHARLIE

*(Still holding her)*

I don't want to say good-bye.

HILDA

*(Smiling again)*

Oh, dear, darling Charlie—you mean you want to marry me?

CHARLIE

You know what I mean.

HILDA

You think I'm a bit of a tramp, don't you, dear?

CHARLIE

*(Drawing her closer)*

I think you're a grown woman—and lovely . . .

HILDA

And a bit of a tramp . . . Well, I'm not . . . *(In farewell)* Charlie—dear, lost Charlie of long ago! *(He starts to kiss her again, but she breaks away)* No, don't kiss me again. You don't exist! *(She moves from him, suddenly turns and faces him)* Will you play a game with me? I'm in a mood. This is strictly a game.

CHARLIE

Anything.

HILDA

Ask me to elope with you, right now. I won't hold you to it. I just want to hear the words.

CHARLIE

*(After a pause—his ardor mixed with a certain carefulness. Arms folded, sardonically)*

Elope with me. I get a very small salary. I don't save a cent of it. I have a long lease on a two-room apartment with an imitation kitchen. It's not a very comfortable apartment, I'm afraid. . . .

HILDA

But it doesn't matter, does it? We'll have springtime forever! This is just a game—you can speak freely. *(CHARLIE goes to her)* Springtime forever . . .

CHARLIE

*(Taking her in his arms)*

You're a great girl.

HILDA

*(Still in his arms, still smiling)*

But somewhat second-hand, and men don't marry second-hand women, do they? They sleep with them. *(With mixed feelings)* If I were really a great girl, I'd give you that night. But I'm selfish. *(Burying her head against his shoulder)* I want to be married, have children and live with one man for the rest of my life. Did you ever hear anything so grotesque? *(Facing him)* Professor, will you please get out of here? Because I'm hating you, just hating you something awful right now. Go back to your books and students and your tiny little apartment—is it two-room or three-room, you stupid son-of-a-bitch!

*(She turns away, trembling with rage.)*

CHARLIE

*(After a long pause)*

If I married you, it wouldn't last a month.

HILDA

Are you still here?

CHARLIE

And I'd break it before you did. I'd never be able to stand the tension—waiting for you to hate the shabby rugs, the faded wallpaper, the leaky faucets. I'd be suspecting every man you met. *(She covers her ears and runs past him across the room. He follows her)* Be patient with me, will you? Try to see what I'm going through. I'm in love with you. Give me half a chance; give me some time. . . . Have dinner with me tonight, will you?

*(She turns on him with hatred. The doorbell rings. Pause. Then she runs to the door and opens it. With high-pitched cordiality:)*

HILDA

Why, Henry! This seems to be my busy day!

*(HENRY comes in. He carries a big box of flowers.)*

HENRY

*(Shyly)*

I happened to be driving in the neighborhood . . .

HILDA

*(Closing the door)*

How nice! Come in!

## HILDA CRANE

HENRY

*(Hesitantly)*

I just picked up some flowers for my house, and I thought I'd get some for you, too.

HILDA

*(Taking the box)*

Aren't you sweet! Thank you! *(She hastens toward the dining room)* Clara!

HENRY

*(Suddenly seeing CHARLIE)*

Oh, I beg your pardon—I didn't realize you had company.

HILDA

That's perfectly all right. You know Professor Jensen, don't you? Mr. Ottwell.

CHARLIE

How are you?

HENRY

*(As they shake hands)*

Pleased to meet you, Professor.

*(CLARA comes in)*

HILDA

Put these in water, please, Clara.

*(As CLARA goes out with the flowers:)*

HENRY

Sure I'm not intruding?

CHARLIE

Matter of fact, I was just leaving.

HILDA

I've enjoyed every moment of it! What you've told me about Shelley has made me see so many things in a new light. (To HENRY) The Professor has demonstrated that Shelley—the poet, you know . . .

HENRY

(*With an identifying nod*)

Yes, indeed.

HILDA

(*Directly to CHARLIE*)

Well, it seems Shelley wasn't a radiant angel but a dreadful man—a bit of a cad, I'd say.

CHARLIE

Well—good-bye.

(*He goes to the hall-tree to get his coat.*)

HENRY

Nice to have met you.

CHARLIE

(*Coat in hand*)

Thank you.

HILDA

Good-bye, Professor!

CHARLIE

Good-bye.

(*He goes.*)

HILDA

*(Continuing her strangely high-spirited mood)*

Let me have your coat, Henry. *(As she helps HENRY with his coat)* Now, try the sofa—it's nice and comfortable. *(She takes his coat and hat to the hall-tree.)*

HENRY

*(Sitting, comfortably)*

Thank you. He's a nice fellow, isn't he?

HILDA

Fair.

HENRY

Didn't he kind of keep company with you once?

HILDA

In a school-teacher way. Would you like a drink, Henry?

HENRY

No, thank you.

HILDA

You never talk about lawn-mowers to me, Henry.

HENRY

I'm afraid they're not very interesting.

HILDA

Oh, they must be. The Ottwell Mower, something you designed yourself, created out of your own mind—and thousands of people use it!



HENRY

Yes, that's true. We sell quite a lot of them. Like I—as I always say, "Where there's grass, there's a customer."

HILDA

That's a vivid phrase.

HENRY

I'm glad you like it.

*(CLARA comes in with two dozen long-stemmed roses in a vase.)*

HILDA

*(Taking the vase)*

Thank you, Clara. *(To HENRY as CLARA goes)* They're simply divine! Thank you again, Henry!

HENRY

*(As she puts the vase on a cabinet)*

I'm glad you're not angry with me.

HILDA

Angry! Why should I be?

HENRY

Well, it seems my mother invited herself here this afternoon.

HILDA

She was kind enough to call on us.

HENRY

She invited herself—let's keep it simple.

HILDA

I think your mother is a very individual woman.

HENRY

But she can be difficult.

HILDA

*(With a candid smile, sitting in the armchair)*

Yes, she can be. . . . I suppose she told you everything I said.

HENRY

I doubt if she left anything out. . . . *(With an effort)* I—I gather that you read my letter.

HILDA

*(Softly)*

Yes, Henry, I did.

HENRY

Well—I mean it more than ever.

HILDA

I thought it was a fine letter.

HENRY

*(Nervously)*

Did you? Well, there's no hurry—no hurry at all about answering it. Take your time.

HILDA

It came so unexpectedly. We've only seen each other five or six times—I've only been home a couple of weeks.

HENRY

You thought I wrote it on impulse, is that it?

HILDA

I liked it. I'm impulsive myself.

HENRY

Generously impulsive, and, if I may say so, very womanly. But you mustn't think I acted in haste. After all, I've known you a long time. From my viewpoint, if you'll excuse a business expression, you're an excellent risk. Your previous marriages I would classify under the heading of natural mistakes of a modern-type young woman.

HILDA

*(Almost weeping)*

Would you, Henry?

HENRY

I hope this doesn't give you the impression that I'm unemotional. I'm not good at saying emotional things, but I tried to make my feelings clear in the letter.

HILDA

You succeeded. I've thought a lot about you and your letter. . . . I'll marry you, Henry.

*(HENRY rises silently, goes to her, lifts her head, kisses her on the lips.)*

HENRY

You make me very happy.

HILDA

I'd like to do that, Henry.

## HILDA CRANE

HENRY

*(After a pause, returning to the sofa)*

Do you—uh—have a distaste for practical talk?

HILDA

I want to hear anything you have to say.

HENRY

*(Sitting on an arm of the sofa)*

May I be frank? I suspect that you haven't saved much money or other assets.

HILDA

I'm afraid I haven't.

HENRY

Yes. Well . . . *(He draws a little notebook from his pocket, and a pencil)* I'm in the habit of getting things down in black and white. So. Say the marriage was set—this is early April—let's say the middle of June? *(HILDA nods numbly. He writes on the paper)* Now, I own fifty-one percent of the Ottwell Mower Company. We're doing very well—especially in the last year, since we're making airplane parts for the government. *(With each statement, he puts quick figures on the paper)* I'll transfer twenty-five percent of my stock to your name.

HILDA

*(Embarrassed and touched)*

Don't, Henry.

HENRY

I'm carrying two hundred thousand dollars' worth of insurance made out to my mother. Tomorrow I'll take out another two hundred thousand dollars' worth in your name.

HILDA

*(As he writes)*

Please, Henry. I wish you wouldn't.

HENRY

It gives me pleasure. (HILDA *cannot answer.*) Now—you'll have six weeks in which to get a trousseau. I'll make a deposit in your name for, say, ten thousand dollars.

HILDA

*(Overcome, stops him gently with her hand)*

Henry. It's too much.

HENRY

I'm sorry. I—I didn't intend to go overboard. But I feel so strongly about you.

*(He puts notebook and pencil into his pocket.)*

HILDA

I'm not reproving you, Henry.

HENRY

I always believe in showing one's intentions by one's acts. *(Rising)* Well—I guess I've said it all.

HILDA

You're so terribly, terribly sweet.

*(She puts her arms around him, kisses him, clings to him)*

HENRY

*(Holding her, gently)*

Will you be patient with my mother?

*(HILDA nods in silence.)*

HENRY

*(Impulsively)*I'd like to say good-bye to *your* mother.

HILDA

Certainly.

*(Going to the foot of the stairs)*

Mama!

MRS. CRANE

Yes?

HILDA

Could you come down?

MRS. CRANE

In a moment.

HENRY

*(Getting hat and coat)*

I'll call you this evening. I'm having dinner at home. . . .  
I don't have to! Will you have dinner with me?

HILDA

Let's make it tomorrow.

HENRY

All right.

*(As HILDA returns shyly to him)*

I was just thinking—we should build a house for ourselves.

HILDA

Yes, Henry.

HENRY

I thought, being a modern woman, you might like modern.

HILDA

Anything you say, Henry.

*(By now MRS. CRANE has come down the stairs.)*

MRS. CRANE

Hello, Henry.

HENRY

*(Trying to conceal his happiness and at the same time to show her that he has succeeded)*

I just wanted to greet you, that's all. I'm leaving now. So long, Mrs. Crane.

MRS. CRANE

Good afternoon, Henry.

*(HENRY goes. There is a moment of silence, while her mother looks at HILDA inquiringly. HILDA is tremulously still.)*

HILDA

Mama . . .

MRS. CRANE

Yes, dear?

HILDA

*(With feeling and dignity)*

I'm going to marry him.

**FLORIDA PLAYERS**

Director: Delwin B. Dusenbury  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA

MRS. CRANE

*(Triumph leaping in her)*

Hilda! I can't tell you how pleased I am!

HILDA

*(Making a profound commitment to herself)*

I'll be the mother of his children. I'll be his housekeeper, his hostess. I'll uphold his dignity, I'll fight for him. I'll be true to him. *(Sinking into a chair)* I don't think it matters at all that I don't love him.

MRS. CRANE

You must never think that way again.

HILDA

Will you teach me how to think?

MRS. CRANE

You'll know by yourself.

HILDA

*(Almost like a child)*

Will you teach me?

MRS. CRANE

Hilda—*(She pauses a moment, then sits. With difficulty, quietly and resolutely)* I didn't love your father when I married him.

HILDA

*(Giving her a startled look, then sinking back into her chair in an odd, almost languorous way, half-shutting her eyes)*  
Didn't you?



MRS. CRANE

I was infatuated with another young man—a very ordinary young man. Then I met this promising lawyer from a well-to-do family. . . .

HILDA

*(In a whisper)*

Papa . . .

MRS. CRANE

I was unhappy on my wedding day, but I wouldn't have backed out if I could. I felt I was doing the right thing. We grew older together. . . . I had you. Somewhere along the line love came in. I lived a very satisfactory life, and so did he.

HILDA

*(Eyes shut, body relaxed)*

Talk to me some more, Mama. Talk to me solemnly.

MRS. CRANE

Would you like me to read you something from the Bible?

HILDA

Is there a passage in it something like this . . . : *(Her eyes open gradually; the words come out of her with growing solemnity)* "You may stumble and fail, again and again, and the Lord will not pass judgment; He will have mercy. *(Sitting up, eyes blazing)* But there will come a time when you dare not falter—the year, the day of your last chance . . . Then my daughter, take whatever hand is held out to you, and walk with courage through the darkness—into the light. . . ."

MRS. CRANE

*(Puzzled)*

From what part of the Bible is that?

HILDA

I made it up. *(Looking at her mother with an engaging, sober little smile)* It isn't in the Bible; but it should be.

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO



## ACT TWO

### SCENE I

*Same as Act One. It is two months later, eight-thirty in the evening of a day in June. On various tables are opened boxes containing wedding presents. On the table behind the sofa is a large tray with whisky bottles, glasses, soda, ginger ale, a pitcher of water.*

*The doorbell rings. CLARA comes quickly downstairs and answers it. CHARLIE enters. He is hatless and wears light summer clothes.*

CHARLIE

*(Nervously)*

Good evening. (CLARA looks at him uncertainly) Is Miss—  
is the family in?

CLARA

They're all at the church. They're having the wedding rehearsal.

CHARLIE

*(Edgy and insistent)*

Was Miss Hilda home when I telephoned last night?

CLARA

*(Uncomfortably)*

Well . . .

CHARLIE

And when I dropped in Monday afternoon—was she home then?

CLARA

Look, Professor, I only work here.

CHARLIE

*(Glancing around the room, seeing the tray on the table)*  
When do you expect them back?

CLARA

*(Helplessly)*

I don't know. They said they was going to a restaurant after the rehearsal. *(She follows his second look at the tray)* Maybe they're coming back, with, maybe, six people—and maybe not. *(CHARLIE says nothing. She adds nervously:)* Mr. Ottwell and his mother. Mr. Nordlinger, he's the best man, and Mrs. Nordlinger. And Mrs. Bromley, she's the matron of honor, and her husband.

CHARLIE

Do you give me your word of honor that she isn't home right now?

CLARA

Oh, sure!

*(The next moment he freezes, for there is the sound of people approaching. Now HILDA and MRS. CRANE come in. They are wearing light summer clothes. They are unpleasantly surprised at the sight of CHARLIE.)*

CHARLIE

*(Stiffly)*

Good evening.

MRS. CRANE

Good evening, Professor Jensen.

HILDA

*(Coolly, closing door)*

Good evening, Charlie. *(To CLARA, as she picks up some telegrams from a table)* Anything besides these telegrams?

CLARA

*(Relieved, starting for the dining room)*

No, ma'am.

*(She goes.)*

CHARLIE

I—I've dropped in several times to see you, but you never seem to be in. I telephoned, also.

MRS. CRANE

*(Who is at the far end of the room at a wall mirror, removing her hat and gloves and placing them on a little table below the mirror)*

Well, we've been preparing for tomorrow's wedding, you know.

CHARLIE

Yes, I know.

HILDA

*(At the other end of the room)*

I wish I could ask you to sit down, but we're expecting a rather intimate group of people.

CHARLIE

I only dropped in to wish you happiness.

HILDA

Thank you.

CHARLIE

And to say good-bye.

HILDA

Oh?

CHARLIE

I'm leaving tomorrow morning for the University of Minnesota. I'm going to teach summer school there—and I'm staying on after that.

HILDA

*(Crossing, kneeling on the sofa to get a cigarette from the sofa-table)*

I see. *(To MRS. CRANE)* Have you checked on the caterer?

MRS. CRANE

Yes, I've been over everything.

HILDA

And did the champagne come?

MRS. CRANE

It'll be here in the morning.

*(HILDA turns, gets a match from coffee-table, lights the cigarette.)*

CHARLIE

*(Standing his ground)*

Minnesota is interested in my book on Shelley, by the way.



HILDA

Are they? How nice!

MRS. CRANE

Do you have that list of the church music?

HILDA

*(Crossing to the telephone-table. Looking about among a miscellany of things)*

Let's see. It was here. Mr. Blumer called and gave it to me on the telephone. . . .

CHARLIE

*(Moving a step into the room. He is forlorn, lost between the two indifferent women at opposite ends of the room)*

I've come to a final conclusion about Shelley.

HILDA

*(Her back to him, still busy, or pretending to be)*

Have you?

CHARLIE

*(Hastily, desperately)*

He was a cad, just as you said. The viewpoint can be sustained. *(HILDA is suddenly still, her back to him. MRS. CRANE gradually faces him, but with indifference)* For instance, his drama, *The Cenci*—that villainous duke, incestuous and sadistic. There he writes honestly, and magnificently. But when he writes about a skylark—compare him with Keats or Byron, and you see the difference. *(Total lack of interest in both women makes him falter as he goes on. He turns to MRS. CRANE)* He—he doesn't really love a bird, or a tree, or a human being. His idealism was the ranting of a schoolboy, and—and . . .

*(He peters out.)*

HILDA

*(Turning to him, gently)*

I'm sorry, Charlie, but we're very busy tonight. I think I'll have to say good-bye.

MRS. CRANE

And good luck, Professor Jensen.

CHARLIE

*(To HILDA)*

I want to talk to you for a moment.

HILDA

I'm afraid that's impossible.

CHARLIE

*(Almost wildly, going to her)*

Look here, I may never see you again. I'm an old friend of yours. I want to ask you some questions. I think I have that privilege.

*(HILDA is frightened by his manner.)*

MRS. CRANE

Professor, may I be frank? Hilda naturally has told me that she rejected your proposal. *(CHARLIE gives HILDA a quick look, which she does not quite meet)* I don't think it's considerate of you to keep telephoning and calling at this house.

CHARLIE

*(Harshly)*

I was wondering how much you had to do with this.

MRS. CRANE

Aren't you being impertinent, Professor?

CHARLIE

Why don't you let Hilda talk for herself?

MRS. CRANE

She has nothing to say to you.

CHARLIE

*(Angrily, extravagantly)*

She has everything to say to me!

MRS. CRANE

*(With controlled but increasing anger, moving toward him)*

I don't understand your attitude, Professor. Hilda has made her choice. As for you—you're not even a full professor, but an associate. You have no income beyond your salary. *(HILDA turns, protestingly, to her mother)* Now, Professor, you can do a lot of harm at a time like this. You can upset Hilda—just as a rowdy on the street, if he threw a rock through that window tonight, might upset her. Why don't you behave nicely and wish Hilda a happy marriage?

CHARLIE

*(After a pause, with great difficulty)*

I—I fully intend to do that. I—that's all I came for. I'm not—a rowdy from the street.

HILDA

*(After a slight pause, going toward MRS. CRANE)*

I think we'll need some ice for the drinks, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

Very well. *(She goes to dining-room door. To CHARLIE)* I'll say good-bye now. And good luck in your new position.

CHARLIE

Thank you.

*(MRS. CRANE goes out through the dining-room. Pause.)*

HILDA

*(Gently, as she puts out her cigarette in an ash tray)*

Make it short, Charlie, will you?

CHARLIE

*(Taking a folded paper from his pocket)*

I have a little gift for you. It's a poem I wrote one night.

HILDA

*(Taking it reluctantly)*

Thank you.

CHARLIE

I think it'll mean something to you.

HILDA

I won't read it now, if you don't mind.

CHARLIE

Listen!

HILDA

Yes?

CHARLIE

I wish you lots of unhappiness—but I'm sure you'll have it, anyway.

HILDA

*(Shocked, furious, turning her back on him)*

Good-bye, Charlie.

CHARLIE

*(Going to her)*

You would have married me if I had asked you. And I have no money. I would have married you, too. If you had only given me another ten minutes, I would have married you.

HILDA

*(Moving away, tossing the poem on the sofa)*

What a feeble little man you are! Feeble and obscure! You'll never write that book, and you'll never marry any woman.

CHARLIE

*(Following her)*

I *will* write the book—if you'll come with me—if you'll marry me.

HILDA

*(Astonished and raging, turning, facing him)*

Marry you! *When?*

CHARLIE

I'm leaving tomorrow morning. Come with me. We can get married somewhere.

HILDA

*(Violently)*

I despise you for saying it now. *(Almost running away from him)* I loathe you. I despise you.

CHARLIE

*(Following her around the sofa)*

Don't run away! Hilda! How are you going to live with him? *(She stands still, her back to him, and he catches up*

*with her*) How are you going to pretend? Do you think you'll fool anybody—him, the people next door, yourself?

HILDA

*(Almost breathless with hatred)*

I despise you, I despise you.

CHARLIE

*(Behind her, putting his arms around her)*

You love me. I was the only thing in your whole life that you remembered with tenderness. We belong together. I love you.

HILDA

*(Fighting him off)*

I despise you. *(CHARLIE turns her to him; she pushes away; he tries to take her in his arms and kiss her, but she fights him off in silence, breaks away half-sobbing)* It's too late, Charlie, it's too late!

*(MRS. CRANE comes with the bowl of ice. HILDA, panting, her back to CHARLIE and to her mother, stands silently. MRS. CRANE stops a moment inside the dining-room door and turns out the lights there, then crosses to the sofa-table and puts the ice on the tray. She deliberately and calmly does not look at the two.)*

I'm afraid you'll have to go now, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Yes . . . Good-bye.

*(He goes directly to front door.)*

HILDA

*(Suddenly looking at him, saying it forever:)*

Good-bye.

*(CHARLIE goes without a backward glance.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(Noticing the sheet of paper on the sofa, and reaching for it)*  
That must be the list of the church music.

HILDA

*(Picking it up quickly)*

No. *(Putting it into her bag, going to a table)* Let's see—that list was here. Mr. Blumer gave it to me on the telephone. *(Finds the list)* Here it is. *(She reads, her voice shaky)* The Boys' Choir will sing "Ave Maria," "Processional March," "Lord's Prayer," and "Oh, Promise Me." *(Suddenly sitting)* Help me. Help me a little, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

*(Going over and standing beside her, quietly and firmly repeating something that has been enacted between them before)*

Henry is strong. He's generous. He's fine. He worships you. Happiness comes from making others happy. When you succeed in making others happy, you succeed in loving them.

HILDA

I know that, and I believe it with all my heart.

MRS. CRANE

It's your only salvation.

HILDA

Help me about his mother. . . . I must learn to get along with her, to respect her. I *will*.

MRS. CRANE

She's a good woman, a remarkable woman. She had to make her own way. Once you're married, and she sees what

you're doing for Henry, she'll change. She'll have to. And when you have children . . .

HILDA

Yes, yes.

MRS. CRANE

. . . all this will be forgotten. Your life will be good. . . .  
(*Pause. People are heard outside*) Are you all right?

HILDA

I'm fine.

(*HILDA rises quickly, takes her compact from her purse, attends to her face while MRS. CRANE goes to the door. The next moment DINK and NELL BROMLEY come in. NELL is of HILDA's generation, an attractive young matron. She is dressed well, but not with HILDA's New York chic. DINK is a few years older, a typical ex-fraternity man, a prosperous real-estate dealer, solid and country-clubbish.*)

NELL

(*With a great, good-natured sigh*)

Well!

MRS. CRANE

Aren't the others with you?

NELL

(*With dour definiteness, taking off her hat*)

No. No, indeed, Mrs. Crane. And I'll have a drink, Hilda.



HILDA

*(With affectionate, humorous appreciation of the crustiness  
of an old friend)*

What's wrong now, Nell?

NELL

We left them in the parking lot, arguing. Your future mother-in-law said she was exhausted and wanted to go home. Henry felt that would be rude. The Nordlingers were hopping on one foot, and then on the other. So I said to myself, "What the hell, I don't have to stand around with a frozen smile—I'm not the bride."

HILDA

*(At the tray, smiling)*

Scotch, Nell?

NELL

*(Sitting)*

Always.

MRS. CRANE

*(Also sitting)*

She's really quite a person when you get to know her, Nell. A year from now, I wouldn't be surprised if you'll be enjoying her colorful qualities.

NELL

A year from now! Listen, folks, if she comes *tonight*, I'm counting ten and then we're leaving.

HILDA

*(Handing NELL the drink)*

Count twenty.

NELL

*(While DINK pours his own)*

That woman frightens me. There's something weird about her. Mark my words, Hilda, she'll make your life miserable if you don't put your foot down.

DINK

Not tonight, Nell. Wait till they get back from their honeymoon, baby.

NELL

That's too late, and you know it, Dink. I'm doing my duty as matron of honor. *(To HILDA)* I did it for Dottie Schultz—she was a Theta Pi right after your time. On her wedding day, I said, "Listen to me, Dot. Right after the ceremony, take Hal aside—she married Hal Docksteder, an Alpha Sig—and you tell him, 'I married *you*, not your mother. You're a big boy now. Take your choice—it's me or her.'" And, by golly, that's exactly what she did, and they're the happiest couple in this town.

DINK

And listen—I sold Hal's mother a little house on Maple Street. I've got a whole block of houses on Maple Street full of mother-in-laws. They love it. They bellyache to each other all day long. I've got two choice properties left. This is important, Hilda—don't build a wing in your new house for that woman.

HILDA

*(Still smiling)*

I'll think it over, Dink.

MRS. CRANE

*(Who has been watching the window)*

They're coming.

*(She goes to the door.)*

HILDA

*(Quickly)*

Nell, be nice, will you?

NELL

*(Warmly)*

Don't be a damn fool.

HILDA

And stick around a while.

DINK

Leave it to me—I want to sell a house, don't I?

*(MRS. CRANE opens the door. MR. and MRS. NORDLINGER enter, followed by HENRY OTTWELL and his mother. MR. NORDLINGER is a middle-aged, prosperous hardware dealer and looks it. MRS. NORDLINGER is stringy, pale, careworn and timid.)*

MRS. CRANE

Come in, come in! I was getting worried about you.

HENRY

Mother was feeling a little tired, and . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

And Henry decided I should come, anyway.

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Indicating the sofa)*

Well, you come right over here and lie down.

HENRY

*(Leading his mother to the sofa)*

That's a good idea.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Protesting)*

I'm okay.

HILDA

*(Putting two pillows together)*

I think you'll find this comfortable.

*(By now MRS. OTTWELL is on the sofa.)*

HENRY

*(Raising his mother's feet)*

Atta girl! Make yourself easy, like you do at home.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Yielding)*

There's a difference.

HENRY

*(Turning to MRS. CRANE with a shy attempt at jocularity,  
feeling out his new intimacy)*

How are you, Mama Crane?

MRS. CRANE

*(Smiling, patting his arm)*

Fine, Henry, just as I was a half hour ago.

*(MRS. OTTWELL burns)*

Sit down, Mrs. Nordlinger—Mr. Nordlinger.

MRS. NORDLINGER

*(Sitting)*

Thank you.

*(By now everyone is comfortably arranged.)*

HENRY

*(In an intimate voice to HILDA)*

Hello, dear.

HILDA

*(Taking his arm)*

Hello, darling.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Unpleasantly—to MRS. NORDLINGER)*

Gimme a cigarette, Edna.

MRS. NORDLINGER

*(With a timid effort at being firm)*

You know you shouldn't.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Sharply)*

Come on, come on!

MRS. NORDLINGER

*(With a sigh)*

Oh, all right.

*(She offers a box, and MRS. OTTWELL takes one.)*

HILDA

Let me light it for you.

*(She strikes a match quickly.)*

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Drily)*

Thanks.

MRS. CRANE

*(Who has mixed a stiff Bourbon and water and silently hands it to MRS. OTTWELL)*

Now, who else would like a drink?

HENRY

Not me.

MR. NORDLINGER

Nor me, either.

MRS. CRANE

Ginger ale for you, Mrs. Nordlinger—am I right?

MRS. NORDLINGER

*(Accepting it)*

Thank you.

*(Pause.)*

NELL

*(Doing her bit)*

I think this lots of fun!

MRS. OTTWELL

Do you?

DINK

Yeah . . . Kinda nice—after a rehearsal—everybody gets together for a little drink.

*(Pause.)*

HENRY

Did you see the tea-set, Mother? Show it to her, Hilda.

(HILDA lifts a beautiful silver tea-set from the whatnot where it stands.)

NELL

Oh, pretty!

MR. NORDLINGER

Say! That's all right!

MRS. NORDLINGER

Just lovely!

DINK

Very nice!

HENRY

From Mr. Temple of the steel company. (*Reading from the card*) "Old-fashioned silver for old-fashioned happiness in a modernistic house. John J. Temple." Isn't it beautiful?

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Indifferently*)

Yeah. (HILDA replaces the tea-set on the whatnot; out of a clear sky, to MR. NORDLINGER) You know, don't you, George, you know better than anybody what kind of a mother I am.

MR. NORDLINGER

You bet I do.

MRS. OTTWELL

Tell 'em—go on, tell 'em how I came to you—and you was mean, wasn't you?

MR. NORDLINGER

I sure was.

HENRY

Mother, everybody knows about that.

(HILDA *steps to* HENRY, *takes his arm, consolingly.*)

NELL

(*Brightly*)

I don't—and I'd love to hear.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*To* MR. NORDLINGER)

Did I fight, or didn't I? Did I let go till I got what I was after?

MR. NORDLINGER

You sure hung on—I got to hand it to you.

MRS. OTTWELL

What did I say? Go ahead, tell 'em. I said, "My boy Henry, he invented a new kind of lawn-mower." And I said, "I'm tellin' you, Mr. Nordlinger, you may be the biggest hardware man in this county, but you're gonna be ten times bigger if you give my boy a chance." (*Looking bitterly at* HENRY) Was I right, huh?

MR. NORDLINGER

By golly, you were. I'll never forget it to my dying day.

NELL

What a beautiful story of mother love!

MRS. CRANE

Just beautiful!



DINK

Well, the little woman here has three children to look after . . .

NELL

*(With a surprised look)*

Yes, I have at that! Well, good night, everybody! *(To MR. NORDLINGER)* Good night, best man!

MR. NORDLINGER

Good night, Mrs. Bromley.

NELL

It was a pleasure to meet you and your charming wife. *(Shaking hands with MRS. NORDLINGER)* And we hope to see lots and lots of you both in the future.

MRS. NORDLINGER

Same here, Mrs. Bromley.

NELL

And you, too, Mrs. Ottwell . . . See you tomorrow!

MRS. OTTWELL

*(With scant courtesy)*

Good night.

DINK

Now don't anybody move. So long—and a great day tomorrow!

*(As they go:)*

HILDA

Thank you, kids.

HENRY

Thank you very much.

MRS. CRANE

Good night.

*(They are gone. Pause.)*

HILDA

*(To MRS. OTTWELL)*

May I refill this for you?

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Sitting up)*

I had enough. I think it's time to go. Thanks just the same.

HENRY

*(Soberly)*

Ma.

MRS. OTTWELL

Yes, my boy.

HENRY

It's the night before the wedding, and we're practically all family. I want to say something. . . . You're happy about Hilda and me, aren't you?

MRS. OTTWELL

*(After a pause)*

Uh-huh.

HENRY

You may not realize it, Ma, but that didn't sound very convincing. *(He sits beside her)* I mean—when we're alone at

home, you smile, and you hug me, and you say, "Everybody's going to know that I'm happy about this wedding." Am I correct, Ma?

MRS. OTTWELL

Guess so.

HENRY

And then we get out—like here tonight—with other people around, and you say, "Uh-huh," and, "Guess so," and you start talking about how you got me started on that lawn-mower. You're like a naughty little girl, Ma. I mean, she does things in company because she knows she can get away with it because Papa and Mama can't spank her in company. So then—well, what can Papa and Mama do? Sooner or later, they've got to spank her. (*Very deliberately*) I want this evening to be a very happy evening, Ma.

(*There is a pause. Then MRS. OTTWELL rises heavily, goes over to HILDA, stands and looks at her a moment, her face working with emotion.*)

MRS. OTTWELL

(*With a great effort*)

I'm proud of havin' you for a daughter-in-law. I wish you every happiness. (*HILDA embraces her, and she embraces HILDA*) You and Henry, the both of you. And I'm gonna do everything I can to help. . . . You're gonna be the boss.

MRS. CRANE

You're not losing a son—you're gaining a daughter. And I'm gaining a son. And you and I are each gaining a friend.

(*MRS. CRANE, in her own stiff way, holds out her arms. HENRY rises, facing his mother. MRS. OTTWELL, after a quick glance at HENRY, goes to MRS. CRANE, and they shake hands.*)

MRS. OTTWELL

That's the truth—just as sure as I'm standin' here. It's the truth, and I believe it!

(HENRY *steps to HILDA, puts his arm happily around her.*)

MRS. NORDLINGER

I'll never forget this moment as long as I live. You couldn't have spoken nicer.

MR. NORDLINGER

No two ways about it.

(HENRY *comes over to his mother. Deeply grateful, he pats her shoulder.*)

HENRY

Now, suppose I take you home, Mother. You must be pretty tired. (*To the NORDLINGERS*) You don't have to go. I'll come back for you.

MRS. NORDLINGER

No, I think we'd better.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*With a sudden deceptive smile*)

I wanna stay!

MRS. CRANE

(*Happily*)

It would be a pleasure!

MRS. OTTWELL

I'm havin' a good time! (*To HENRY, with sudden joviality*) Why don't you take them old folks home, and us three girls'll sit here and gab a little. I think it's time the three of us made each other's acquaintance.

HENRY

*(Pleased)*

Well! . . . You're feeling better, aren't you?

MRS. OTTWELL

I'm feelin' fine. Good night, Edna. Good night, George.  
Come back for me later, Henry.

HENRY

*(With a big smile)*

Well . . . This *is* nice! *(He impulsively kisses his mother on the cheek. She almost imperceptibly slides away from the kiss)* See you later, folks.

*(He goes to the door, shepherding the NORDLINGERS out.)*

MRS. NORDLINGER

Good night, all.

MR. NORDLINGER

Good night.

HILDA

It was so good of you to come.

MRS. CRANE

Come again, often.

MRS. NORDLINGER

Thank you.

*(The three go.)*

MRS. CRANE

Now, you come back to the sofa and make yourself comfortable.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Sitting in a chair—still with that odd smile, her eyes burning)*

I like it here.

*(HILDA is watching her.)*

MRS. CRANE

May I give you another drink?

MRS. OTTWELL

No—but I'll tell you what I *would* like.

MRS. CRANE

Please!

MRS. OTTWELL

I bet you got a lotta things to do.

MRS. CRANE

Well, I thought I had, but . . .

HILDA

I believe Mrs. Ottwell wants to have a talk with me, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

*(A little indecisively)*

Oh . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

Yeah—a little friendly private talk. You know, stuff that a mother would like to say about her son to her future daughter-in-law.

MRS. CRANE

*(Very cordially)*

Why, of course! I understand perfectly.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Bullying her with a smile)*

Now, you beat it right now, huh?

MRS. CRANE

With pleasure. *(She starts for the stairway)* I'll see you later?

MRS. OTTWELL

You bet your life! *(MRS. CRANE goes upstairs. MRS. OTTWELL turns to HILDA, looking her over silently, eyes resting on HILDA's hand.)* That's a beautiful engagement ring Henry gave you.

HILDA

*(Smiling but watching her)*

Yes, it is!

MRS. OTTWELL

And that's a classy dress. Is it part of the trousseau you bought in Chicago?

HILDA

*(Moving toward the sofa)*

No, I thought I wouldn't wear those clothes until after the wedding. I've had this dress for some time.

MRS. OTTWELL

I see. Some other man bought it for you. *(HILDA stops cold and the smile dies on her face)* How long do you figure *this* marriage is gonna last?

HILDA

*(Facing her)*

Forever.

MRS. OTTWELL

That's because you love Henry, huh?

HILDA

No. Because Henry loves me.

MRS. OTTWELL

Did Henry sign that lawn-mower stock over to you yet—that twenty-five percent?

HILDA

I've told you both that I'll never take it. I'm not a business woman.

MRS. OTTWELL

Oh, ain't you?

HILDA

Why do you talk to me like this?

MRS. OTTWELL

Because tonight was too much! I don't know how I coulda held in as long as I did. (*Harshly, deliberately*) I don't believe you got good intentions. And I got reasons for thinkin' so. . . . I know everything about you from the day you was born, see?

HILDA

(*Moving close to her*)

There's nothing in my life I'm ashamed of.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Leaning back*)

No?



HILDA

No.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(With savage, suddenly quiet deliberateness)*

When you was at college, you and two other girls was brought up before the Dean of Women for bein' drunk. Correct me if I'm wrong.

HILDA

*(Puzzled)*

Drunk? . . . Oh—I begin to remember. Good heavens! *(She looks at MRS. OTTWELL helplessly)* How can you use the word drunk? It was an escapade.

MRS. OTTWELL

Excapade, huh? And what about your first husband—Kenneth Somebody. I got his name written down and everything. You slept with him before you married him. Try to deny it!

HILDA

*(Baffled)*

I . . . What's that got to do with . . . ? I loved him! Of course I . . .

*(She stops, helpless again.)*

MRS. OTTWELL

When you was twenty years old, you got drunk. When you was twenty-one, you slept with a fella. I guess that's what all the nice college girls was doin', huh?

HILDA

*(Very simply)*

Why, yes. There were many like me—here in Winona—at other schools—everywhere.

MRS. OTTWELL

Sure—loose girls.

HILDA

No. We were serious . . . (*Sitting; with an effort to think it out, to say it*) You see, we believed women were the equals of men. To be fair, we usually married our seducers. At least, I did.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Still quiet*)

I suppose Henry knows all about this, huh?

HILDA

(*Sharply, a little defensive*)

Certainly not. Why should he?

MRS. OTTWELL

You're damn right, why should he! And why should he know what happened after your first divorce, either! I had you looked up, lady. (*Opening her bag*) I been carryin' this report in here until I thought it would burn up the bag. (*Taking out some typewritten sheets*) Want a few facts? I'll give you some facts. (*She snaps the bag shut. Referring to the papers*) In Chicago, exactly six months after your divorce, a party by the name of—Colton Hedges—moved into your apartment. How do you like that?

HILDA

Well, I had a job. . . . I paid my own bills. . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

You paid your own bills! And you paid your own bills in New York, too, a year later, when you ran into a party by the

name of—I forget. But you slept together. He had his place and you had yours, but that didn't make no difference—not to you, it didn't! And you claim there's nothin' in your life you're ashamed of!

HILDA  
(*Spiritedly*)

Yes, I do.

MRS. OTTWELL  
(*Her voice rising*)

You think you're a fit woman for my Henry to marry?

HILDA  
(*Meeting her*)

Yes!

MRS. OTTWELL  
(*In a final triumphant challenge*)

If you had a son, would you pick a woman like you for him?  
(*Pause.*)

HILDA  
(*Rising, moving away*)

I understand you so well. . . . I feel for you. . . . (*Turning to her*) Why can't you understand me? I've never done anything in my life that I didn't believe in at the time. There are so many women like me. We can't live your way, or my mother's way. When we fail, we suffer. I've failed. But now at last I think I know how to make a man happy. I think I'm ready now to be the mother of children. Maybe I can be a better wife and mother than . . .

MRS. OTTWELL  
(*Quickly*)

Than who? Than me?

HILDA

*(Delicately)*

Maybe.

MRS. OTTWELL

You're so stuck on yourself! . . . How come you didn't tell it all to Henry, then? How come!

HILDA

I chose not to.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Grimly)*

And you think he'll never find out!

HILDA

*(After a pause)*

Why don't you tell him? . . . *Why haven't you told him already?*

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Harshly)*

You think I was afraid!

HILDA

*(With sudden gentleness)*

I think you want him to be happy. . . . Just as much as I do.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Trembling)*

You think I was afraid, don't you?

HILDA

That's possible, too.

MRS. OTTWELL

You don't know me!

*(Both women suddenly listen, for there is a sound outside. The next moment HENRY knocks on the door and comes in. During the following few moments HILDA, more in control than MRS. OTTWELL, watches her. MRS. OTTWELL, who is in great inner conflict, is continuously aware of the brooding challenge in HILDA's eyes.)*

HENRY

*(Not too sure how things have gone, watching  
but comfortable)*

Where's your mother?

HILDA

She's upstairs.

HENRY

*(Passing his mother, patting her on the shoulder—to HILDA)*

I was worrying about your Uncle John up in Decatur. If he's going to give you away, he'd better be here early tomorrow, don't you think?

*(He sits.)*

HILDA

He's driving right to the church—he'll be there, all right.

HENRY

*(Studying his mother)*

You look a little tired.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Smiling with a great effort)*

I am, kinda.

## HILDA CRANE

HENRY

*(After a quick look at her—then at HILDA)*

Well, we'll be going soon. . . . You two have a nice visit?

HILDA

Just wonderful, Henry. We gossiped—and, oh, we talked about a lot of things. . . . But I'm sure your mother *is* tired. I think you'd better take her home, dear.

HENRY

*(Reluctantly, rising)*

Guess you're right . . . *(He goes to his mother, who smiles at him again)* Come on, Ma. *(He helps her to her feet.)*

HILDA

Good night! I'm so glad you stayed.

MRS. OTTWELL

Good night.

HENRY

*(Going to the door and opening it, as his mother comes toward him)*

Uh, Mother, you don't mind waiting for me in the car a minute, do you?

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Beaten)*

All right, Henry.

*(She goes out.)*

HENRY

I won't be long. *(HENRY closes the door. Pause. He goes to HILDA and embraces her)* Dearest . . .

HILDA

Yes—dear?

HENRY

I love you so.

HILDA

*(Deeply moved)*

Do you, Henry?

HENRY

*(He takes her hand and leads her to sofa)*

You know, a fellow gets silly little ideas sometimes. I sort of pictured tonight . . . *(They sit; he puts his arm around her. She puts her head on his shoulder)* Well, just you and me sitting here, laughing and talking things over, like on the evening before a great and wonderful voyage.

HILDA

I know.

HENRY

I sort of saw myself sitting back, and you—well, you carrying on, making fun and being gay.

HILDA

I'll be like that for you, Henry. Many times.

HENRY

*(Anticipating the honeymoon)*

In San Francisco . . . On the ship . . . And on the beach at Waikiki . . .

HILDA

Yes, Henry.

HENRY

I think what I like the most about you is how gay you can be. You make me all happy inside, just watching you. Wherever you are, the place lights up.

HILDA

Don't, Henry . . . You don't want to break me up, do you?  
*(She rises, moves away, unable to face him.)*

HENRY

I was going to keep this as a surprise, but I don't know, maybe I should tell you. The contractor and the decorator—they're going to work day and night, and when we come back, that house is going to be complete—the books on the shelves, your initials on the linens, the music on the piano. Everything like in a magazine picture-house!

HILDA

*(Turning quickly and facing him—with great sweetness)*  
How wonderful!

HENRY

*(Going to her, taking her in his arms)*

Know something? I'm glad it took so long to happen. I think it's right that it should be now, and not before. I think it takes a little bit of living till people get so that . . . Oh, you know what I mean.

HILDA

*(Very quietly)*

Yes, Henry.

HENRY

Well, guess I'd better go. *(He draws her close)* Are you sure you love me?



HILDA

*(Holding him very close)*

Nobody else, ever—ever . . .

HENRY

The sun is going to shine tomorrow!

HILDA

Yes, Henry! Yes, yes!

*(He kisses her on the lips tenderly. She clings to him, kisses him back. Without a word, he releases her and goes. HILDA stands completely limp. Then she turns off the wall switch, leaving the room in darkness except for the lamp on the table where she has put her bag. She suddenly remembers CHARLIE's poem, takes it out of her bag, and, without hesitation, tears it into bits and drops it into the wastebasket. Then, bag in hand, she turns out the remaining lamp, leaving only the hall light. She moves to the doorway, locks the door. Then slowly, painfully she goes upstairs.)*

*Curtain*

## ACT TWO

### Scene II

*Same as before. It is the following afternoon, about 3:45. The living room is ready for the wedding reception. The furniture has been rearranged, a few folding tables are stacked against the dining-room entrance, a new table covered with a white cloth holds a large wedding cake, and there are flowers everywhere.*

CLARA, in a fresh and ornate apron, is setting out silver and napkins on the wedding-cake table. MRS. CRANE comes down the stairs, fully arrayed for the wedding in a flowered dress and a summery hat. At her shoulder is an orchid. She is putting on her gloves. On her ungloved hand we see several old-fashioned rings and a jeweled bracelet.

CLARA

Oh, my, you look gorgeous, Mrs. Crane!

MRS. CRANE

Thank you, Clara. (*Briskly, looking around*) Now—everything seems all right. You might close that window, Clara. It may rain before we get back.

CLARA

Yes, ma'am. (*As she does*) The rented car's outside with the chauffeur.

MRS. CRANE

He's early.

CLARA

He said when you're driving the bride you better play safe.  
(*The telephone rings.*)

MRS. CRANE

(*Answering, happy; this is a great day for her*)

Hello. . . . Oh, hello, Mr. Nordlinger! (*As she speaks, HILDA comes down the stairs, beautifully clothed for her third wedding. Her smart and gay suit is adaptable for traveling*)  
Yes . . . Yes . . .

(*HILDA listens tensely*)

Just a moment. (*To HILDA*) Henry's mother has already left for the church with Mrs. Nordlinger.

HILDA

(*Shaking with inward relief*)

They have?

MRS. CRANE

Two minutes ago. Anything you want to know?

HILDA

(*With unconcealed anxiety*)

How is Henry?

MRS. CRANE

Dear child, we've asked Mr. Nordlinger that same question three times today.

HILDA

I'm sorry.

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Into the telephone, smiling)*

Now, shall we, how do they say, synchronize our watches?  
I have a quarter to four. Hilda and I will leave here at . . .

*(She looks questioningly at HILDA)*

HILDA

Exactly five minutes to four.

MRS. CRANE

*(On the telephone)*

Exactly five minutes to four. I think you and Henry might  
as well start now, don't you? Good!

HILDA

*(Almost hysterically)*

My bouquet!

MRS. CRANE

Clara has it.

HILDA

*(Hastening to the dining-room door)*

Clara! Will you give me my flowers, please?

MRS. CRANE

*(Into the telephone)*

Drive carefully. We'll all be seeing each other soon!

*(She hangs up. CLARA comes in with a box which she gives to HILDA)*

CLARA

You're exquisite—just simply exquisite.

HILDA

*(Taking out a bouquet of orchids and lilies of the valley,  
and giving CLARA the box. Very emotionally)*

Thank you very much, Clara—God bless you!

CLARA

Yes, ma'am!

*(She goes.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(Looking HILDA over)*

Turn around. *(HILDA does. Fussing a little with HILDA's dress)* There. Be careful when you sit in the car—it tends to wrinkle up.

*(There is a pause. HILDA looks at her watch.)*

HILDA

Well . . . *(She sits)* Nine more minutes.

MRS. CRANE

*(Still looking HILDA over)*

You look lovely.

HILDA

Mama . . .

MRS. CRANE

*(Sitting)*

Yes, Hilda?

HILDA

I have the strangest feeling. It seems that any second I'll wake up in that New York hotel room. Life is fantastic, isn't it? You get on a train, you get off the train, you meet some-

body—a word is spoken. And then, step by step, almost as if it were happening while part of you is asleep, you sign away your heart, you commit your soul.

MRS. CRANE

You have many, many happy years ahead of you.

HILDA

*(Straightening up, with resolution)*

Yes, I have! *(Turning to her, solemn and searching)* You guarantee it, don't you, Mama?

MRS. CRANE

Yes—yes, I do! *(The doorbell rings. MRS. CRANE goes to answer it. To CLARA, who appears from the dining room)* Never mind, Clara. *(CLARA goes back. MRS. CRANE opens the door, and there stand MRS. OTTWELL and MRS. NORDLINGER. Astonished:)* Why, Mrs. Ottwell! Shouldn't you be at the church?

*(HILDA rises, instantly on guard.)*

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Over-jeweled, but inoffensively dressed in black and white)*

I wanna talk to you and your daughter.

*(She comes into the room, followed by the anxious MRS. NORDLINGER.)*

MRS. NORDLINGER

Please—I really think you shouldn't strain yourself.

MRS. OTTWELL

I'm fine! I feel great! Now, you do like I say, Edna. Drive up to Main Street and back. We got time.

MRS. NORDLINGER

I don't know what to do. Henry thinks we're at the church right now!

MRS. CRANE

It *is* rather late.

MRS. OTTWELL

(*To* MRS. NORDLINGER)

I'll be through in a few minutes. *Go on!*

(MRS. NORDLINGER goes unhappily. HILDA *stands silent*. MRS. CRANE *maintains an air of friendliness*. MRS. OTTWELL *stands glaring at them, breathing heavily*.)

MRS. CRANE

Sit down, Mrs. Ottwell. We have five whole minutes, and you might as well be comfortable. (MRS. OTTWELL *sits*) Would you like a little brandy, perhaps?

MRS. OTTWELL

(*Trying to control her agitation*)

Look, I got a proposition. Nobody knows about this—Mrs. Nordlinger—Henry—nobody, see? We was on the way to the church when I got this idea. . . . That's why I ain't got the bonds with me. Look, there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds in my safety vault. (*To* HILDA) I'll hand 'em over to you, or your mother, first thing tomorrow morning. I swear to God I'll do it. If you'll only just get the hell out of this town right now . . .

(HILDA *remains silent and inscrutable*.)

MRS. CRANE

(*Shocked*)

Do you realize what you're suggesting?

MRS. OTTWELL

I got a big interest in the Ottwell Building—I'll sign it over to you—I'll get a lawyer and find out a way so Henry'll never know. . . .

MRS. CRANE

We're all going to pretend that you've never spoken. . . .

MRS. OTTWELL

Goddam you, I'll give you my jewelry—it's worth fifty thousand dollars. Just step out into my car, and drive away and never come back.

MRS. CRANE

Now, Mrs. Ottwell . . .

HILDA

*(With great distinctness)*

The answer is no.

MRS. OTTWELL

Don't you play innocent on me—I know what you are! And you . . . *(To MRS. CRANE)* You know what she is, too . . . *(Turning violently on HILDA)* You bum!

MRS. CRANE

*(Losing her temper)*

How dare you, how dare . . . !

HILDA

*(Stopping her)*

Don't, Mama. I expected this. *(Glancing at her wrist watch—to MRS. OTTWELL)* You have exactly three minutes. I think



you'd better go outside and wait for Mrs. Nordlinger. There's nothing else you *can* do.

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Putting her hand to her throat, suddenly sick)*

My heart is choking me. . . . I'm dizzy. . . . *(She sinks back on the sofa)* I'm dizzy.

*(MRS. CRANE hovers over her with anxiety.)*

HILDA

Don't bother, Mama. Is Mrs. Nordlinger outside yet?

*(MRS. CRANE looks.)*

MRS. OTTWELL

I'm sick, I tell you! I ain't fakin'. . . . I'm sick. . . . I'm dizzy. I can't move.

HILDA

*(Implacably)*

You'll be all right.

MRS. CRANE

*(At the window)*

There's the car now.

MRS. OTTWELL

I can't breathe. . . .

HILDA

You'd better start breathing. This marriage is going through on schedule.

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Going to her)*

Now, see if you can't get up.

HILDA

*(Not moving)*

Don't help her, Mama. She can manage.

MRS. OTTWELL

I'll forbid the banns, that's what I'll do! I'll get up in church and . . .

*(Suddenly staggering to her feet.)*

HILDA

*(Cuttingly)*

Shut up!

MRS. OTTWELL

*(Raging and weak, going to HILDA)*

I'll kill you for that—as sure as you're standing here.

HILDA

*Shut up, shut up! (MRS. OTTWELL suddenly snatches HILDA's bouquet from her hand and staggers back to the sofa, slumping down. Wildly:) Give me the flowers! Let go of my flowers!*

MRS. CRANE

*(Grabbing MRS. OTTWELL's hand)**Let them go! (MRS. OTTWELL hangs on, panting. MRS. CRANE slaps her hand hard, several times) Let go! Let go!**(MRS. OTTWELL suddenly throws the bouquet out on the floor. MRS. CRANE hastens, picks it up and examines it carefully.)*





HILDA

*(Breathing hard)*

Is it all right?

MRS. CRANE

*(Fixing it a little)*

It'll do.

*(The two women turn to MRS. OTTWELL, who looks sick. After a moment, HILDA moves over to her.)*

HILDA

You'll never, never, never stop this wedding. I've been up all night, thinking of every possible trick you might play. Your bluff last night was not very clever. *(Sitting on the sofa, facing MRS. OTTWELL)* Now, listen to me—and listen carefully. Because my mother and I are leaving in exactly one minute. . . . There is nothing I will stop at. Do you hear? Nothing! If you are not at the church, the ceremony will go on, anyway. If you're still in this house when we come back, if you are found dead on this sofa, let me tell you exactly what your dying words were. You said: "Don't tell Henry I died, until after the ceremony. Tell him I saw the light at the last minute. I didn't have no grudge against that fine girl. I wish them both happiness." And if you should die in the presence of Henry, you'd better use the words I just gave you. I hope for your sake that you remember them. *(Rising, picking up her gloves from arm of sofa and putting them on)* If you do say something ugly, Henry won't hate me; he'll hate you. Remember, I'm going to live, *and with him.* . . . I'll tell him he must overlook your awful words, he must forgive you for hogging his whole life until he was over forty. I'll defend your memory, and that's how I'll destroy it. *(Sits again)* You see, you're not in a good position. You daren't forbid the banns. You'll only make a joke and a

scandal of yourself. If I were the first woman you had tried to liquidate in Henry's life, you'd have a chance. But this is an old game of yours, and today is one time too many. (*Rising*) So get up, like a brave little soldier, and attend this wedding, and smile. (*She stands, quivering and desperately proud, waiting.* MRS. OTTWELL, *who has not moved from her half-reclining position on the sofa, remains motionless, expressionless.* HILDA *turns to her mother*) Now, Mama, shall we go?

MRS. CRANE

Yes, Hilda.

HILDA

(*To* MRS. OTTWELL)

Your car is outside. And you can do just as you please.

(MRS. OTTWELL, *with a prodigious effort, gets to her feet. Without looking at the two women, breathing heavily, she goes to the door, opens it, and leaves.* MRS. CRANE *instantly follows to the open door and looks after her.*)

MRS. CRANE

I think we can go now.

HILDA

(*Suddenly in agony, turning away from her mother*)

What am I turning into! What am I becoming!

MRS. CRANE

(*Taken aback, tries to reassure her*)

I was about to pay you a compliment. I—I don't quite know how to put this. . . .

## HILDA

*(Stopping her with a look—with strange gentleness)*

Mama! Why don't you say, "You're my daughter at last!"  
And let it go at that?

*(Gravely she goes to her mother, takes the bouquet from her, takes her arm. MRS. CRANE looks at her for an uncertain instant and then, sharing HILDA's resolution, goes out with her.)*

*Curtain*





## ACT THREE



## ACT THREE

### SCENE I

*Two years later, a Sunday afternoon in June. The living room of HENRY and HILDA OTTWELL's Winona home. The room is modernistic, soft-toned, showing all the art of the interior decorator. It has a Greek simplicity and austerity. A large sofa, done in one tone which contrasts effectively with the rest of the room, is the dominating note. Two great windows are set into the two walls, showing the gardens and shrubbery outside, a glimpse of another wing of the house, and the town in the distance. Over the fireplace hangs an oil portrait of HENRY's mother. It is not too large nor too prominent, but it cannot easily be ignored. A stairway breaks up behind the fireplace.*

*As the curtain rises, HENRY, in his shirt sleeves, is stretched out on the sofa reading a book. There is a little more gray in his hair than when we saw him last. MRS. CRANE is at a table, looking over a selection of magazines. She takes one, goes to a chair and sits.*

HENRY

*(Looking up)*

This is a pretty daring book, Mama Crane. Calling the great poet Shelley a low-down good-for-nothing! *(Glancing at the picture of his mother)* If Mother was alive today, wouldn't she be surprised to hear me appreciating stuff like this!

MRS. CRANE

I think she would have been pleased to see you happy.

HENRY

She'd have found something to complain about. The baby, for instance. She'd have been disappointed that it wasn't a boy.

MRS. CRANE

I don't think you should talk like that, Henry—not today, anyway.

HENRY

*(Accepting the reproof, sobering, returning to the book)*  
Guess not.

MRS. CRANE

*(After a pause)*

Don't you think we'd better get started?

HENRY

Plenty of time. I like a cemetery better in the cool of the afternoon. . . .

MRS. CRANE

Just as you say, Henry.

HENRY

I think you should stay behind and look after Hilda. I'm only going to lay some flowers on the grave and come back.

MRS. CRANE

No. I'd like to pay my respects to your mother, too. As long as I live, I wish to honor her anniversary. And Hilda feels the same way. She said to me this morning, "Mama, I *hate* being tired and run-down on the one day when I can pay tribute to the memory of that splendid woman."

HENRY

I'm glad she can't go. In a way, this little breakdown'll do her good. She needs a rest. She's been overdoing.

MRS. CRANE

I think you're right, Henry.

HENRY

I've analyzed it. First, I thought, she works too hard—all those committees, and running this household and all, and being such a wonderful mother to the baby . . .

MRS. CRANE

That's it! Of course it is!

HENRY

*(Sitting up)*

Then I thought, it might be this fellow.

*(He indicates the book.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(On guard)*

Professor Jensen? What do you mean?

HENRY

An old beau—he writes a book—he comes here to teach summer school . . .

MRS. CRANE

Nonsense!

HENRY

That's what I said to myself. Why, she hasn't even looked at this book! So then I checked over everything, and I realized that today is the second anniversary of Mother's death, and Hilda suddenly goes to bed and can't eat or sleep or play with the baby. . . . When? Two days before! (MRS. CRANE *starts to protest*) Now, wait a minute. Last year she came to the cemetery—but it was a strain on her. . . . You know it. . . . Do you think she might feel a little guilty about Mother's passing away?

MRS. CRANE

(Going to him)

Why? It might be different if your mother had continued to feel as she did. (Sitting beside him) But I was with her in her last moments. I never left her bedside that day, and she was so happy for you, Henry—for you both!

HENRY

I know. I agree with you! But . . .

MRS. CRANE

With her last breath she begged me not to spoil your honeymoon, not to let you know that she passed away—to wait until your return. (Glancing at the portrait) I think she'll forgive me for having disobeyed her request.

HENRY

Still, to Hilda, coming home in the middle of the honeymoon . . . (MRS. CRANE *is about to protest again*) Wait a minute! I figured it *might* make her feel guilty. But you're right, Mama Crane. So I laid that aside.

MRS. CRANE

*(With relief. Patting his shoulder)*

You're a sensible man, Henry.

*(She rises and returns to her chair, picking up her embroidery from a table.)*

HENRY

Maybe she's getting a little bored with Winona! Why can't she take a little trip with you? Take the baby along, and the nurse—a cruise, maybe.

MRS. CRANE

She wouldn't leave you, and you know it.

HENRY

*(Pleased)*

I guess you're right. . . . *(He relaxes, picks up the book)*  
You know, I wish you'd move in here and live with us.

MRS. CRANE

*(Peacefully)*

We'll see. Maybe. One of these days.

*(MISS KEAVNEY, the baby's nurse, comes in from the rear.)*

MISS KEAVNEY

Excuse me, but the baby has taken another couple of steps.

HENRY

*(Delighted, sitting up)*

This I've got to see!

MRS. CRANE

*(Rising)*

Yes, indeed!

*(HILDA comes in. Over an attractive dress, she wears an apron. She looks pale and drawn.)*

HILDA

Have you told him, Miss Keavney?

HENRY

*(Going to her and putting his arms around her)*

Darling, why aren't you in bed?

HILDA

*(Brightly)*

Have you told him?

HENRY

The baby can wait. *(Leading her to the sofa)* You come over here and lie down.

HILDA

*(Holding back)*

No, Henry. I'm tired of pampering myself. It's the servants' day off, and I've got a casserole in the oven. . . .

MRS. CRANE

I'll take care of the casserole.

MISS KEAVNEY

Don't bother—I'll be glad to.



HENRY

*(Getting HILDA to the sofa)*

Thanks, Miss Keavney. *(To HILDA, as MISS KEAVNEY goes)*  
Now I insist.

HILDA

*(Sitting)*

I'm all right—and I'm coming along to the cemetery.

HENRY

*(Lifting her feet and sitting at the end of the sofa, leaving  
his hand affectionately on her ankle)*

You'll do nothing of the kind. No, ma'am. *(Comfortably)*  
And I'm going to tell you why. I've been watching you for the  
last week or so, and I've been reading psychology books about  
marriage. *I think you've been too good a wife.*

*(He pats her ankle. HILDA turns her head away.)*

MRS. CRANE

I know just what you mean, Henry.

HENRY

You're giving, giving, giving all the time. *(Stroking her  
ankle)* You see, dear, I'm still afraid of losing you. *(Almost  
smugly)* That's how far I am from being conceited! *(MRS.  
CRANE is about to protest good-naturedly)* No, no, I know I'm  
right! . . . But let me add: time takes care of many things.

MRS. CRANE

Truer words were never spoken.

HENRY

As we both grow older, I look forward to a turning point.  
*(He turns to MRS. CRANE)* On that day, *she'll* be grateful that

she has *me*. Every time she looks in the mirror and sees a wrinkle, she'll be sorry. . . . (*He strokes her ankle again. She draws her leg up under her a bit*) But I'll be glad. (*He turns to her*) Do you find that an offensive thought, dear?

(HILDA numbly shakes her head.)

MRS. CRANE

I think it's beautiful.

(Pause.)

HENRY

(*Rising and going behind the sofa above HILDA*)

And now—you stay here . . . (*As he speaks, he unties her apron and takes it off*) and your mother and I will be back in an hour.

HILDA

(*Clutching the apron*)

Henry, please don't.

HENRY

(*Holding on*)

Now, dearest.

HILDA

(*Shakily*)

I want my apron!

HENRY

(*Dismayed, letting it go*)

All right, dear.

HILDA

*(Looking at the apron, still shaky)*

You've crumpled it! You've crumpled and wrinkled it! *(She tries to smooth it)* The wrinkles won't come out! *(Suddenly looking at him and seeing the distress on his face)* I'm sorry, Henry. *(Putting her arms around him as she kneels on the sofa)* I'm terribly sorry.

HENRY

*(Patting her shoulder)*

That's all right, dearest.

HILDA

I—I've never been this way before, have I?

HENRY

Of course not.

HILDA

I've never been—unpleasant to you, have I?

HENRY

Never.

HILDA

And I never will be!

HENRY

I know that, dearest. *(Starting for the door, to MRS. CRANE)*  
Maybe you'd better stay here with her, eh?

MRS. CRANE

I think so.

## HILDA CRANE

HILDA

I'm all right! I'm fine. (*As she goes to a chair over which his coat is draped, gets his coat and gives it to him*) Here's your coat, dear. (*Getting his Panama hat from the chair*) And your hat. (*Picking up a large flower spray which rests against the wall*) And don't forget the flowers.

HENRY

(*As she hands him everything*)

Thank you, dear. (*To MRS. CRANE*) Stay for supper, won't you?

MRS. CRANE

(*Glancing at HILDA, whose face neither invites nor repels*)

Well, Clara *is* expecting me home.

HENRY

Never mind Clara. You stay. (*Turning to HILDA with a commanding air*) And young lady . . .

HILDA

(*Quickly backing away*)

I'm fine! I'm wonderful! I'll have a big casserole supper waiting for you.

HENRY

(*Helplessly*)

All right, dear. (*Turning to MRS. CRANE*) I won't be long!  
(*Carrying the coat, the hat and the wreath, he goes.*  
HILDA stands silently a moment, her hands involuntarily  
smoothing her apron. Then she unties it.)

HILDA

*(Softly)*

How silly to make such a fuss! *(She puts the apron on the sofa, then paces the room, looks toward a big window. Suddenly hastening to the window and drawing the great curtains)* I think I'll shut out the sunlight and the trees and the streets of Winona. There! *(With the curtains drawn, the single-toned quality of the room and the contrasting sofa become more evident)* There is no Winona, Illinois! If you don't like a town, you draw the curtains. If you don't like a world . . . *(Then she stands unhappily, arm on the stair-post)* You don't have to stay, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

Don't you want me to stay?

HILDA

*(Politely)*

Of course, Mama. You're always welcome. *(She notices the book on the coffee-table. With sudden annoyance:)* What's that book doing here?

MRS. CRANE

Henry is reading it.

HILDA

*(Quickly)*

Have you said anything to him?

MRS. CRANE

Of course not! What is there to say, for heaven's sake?

HILDA

Has—Charlie—telephoned you again?

MRS. CRANE

He called this morning.

HILDA

Did you tell him I have a home of my own and a telephone number?

MRS. CRANE

I said I was sure you had no desire to hear from him.

HILDA

I see. An old friend of mine comes here to teach in summer school, a distinguished man, head of the English department at Minneosta, and you treat him like a schoolboy.

MRS. CRANE

Oh, Hilda, you've been so wonderful for two years. What's got into you?

HILDA

I wonder . . . (*Restless, going to the telephone table*) He's staying at the Ardmore Apartments, isn't he?

MRS. CRANE

(*As HILDA picks up the telephone*)

Don't call him, Hilda.

HILDA

(*Dialing*)

I owe him an apology, don't I?

MRS. CRANE

I'll apologize. I'll call him tomorrow.

HILDA

I think he'll like it better from me.

MRS. CRANE

I thought you had no wish to see him again, ever.

HILDA

*(Intensely)*

Would you like me to scream, Mama? (MRS. CRANE *sits, helpless. Into the telephone*) Professor Jensen, please . . . (Hunggrily, her face lighting up) Hello, Charlie. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . How are you? It's so good to hear your voice! . . . Why . . . (She hesitates. With sudden decision) I don't see why not! Certainly! If you have nothing better to do. . . . Yes, we have a brand-new house— Two-forty-seven Green Street . . . Fine! I'll be delighted to see you! (She hangs up. MRS. CRANE *says nothing*) Why shouldn't I? What's wrong about it? *Why can't I have somebody to talk to?* This is my own home. Henry'll be back. (Turning, going to the sofa) I don't think you'll want to stay, will you? You never did care for the Professor.

MRS. CRANE

I told Henry I'd stay for a while.

HILDA

*(Resentfully throwing herself on the sofa)*

Very well. Stay.

MRS. CRANE

You've been getting increasingly hostile to me recently. I don't know why.

HILDA

Hostile? . . . I'm inviting you to stay.

MRS. CRANE

Thank you. I will.

HILDA

Good . . .

*(She lies back on the sofa. MISS KEAVNEY comes from the rear, carrying a small tray containing a glass of water and a bottle of pills.)*

MISS KEAVNEY

*(To HILDA)*

Excuse me, Mrs. Ottwell . . .

*(HILDA does not respond, then suddenly she does, sitting up.)*

HILDA

I beg your pardon. I sometimes forget that I'm Mrs. Ottwell.

MISS KEAVNEY

It's time for your pill.

HILDA

Put it by my bedside, Miss Keavney. I don't intend to sleep this afternoon. I'll get to it eventually.

MISS KEAVNEY

Yes, Mrs. Ottwell.

*(MISS KEAVNEY goes upstairs. Pause.)*

HILDA

*(Looking at portrait of MRS. OTTWELL)*

Were you at her bedside when she died?



MRS. CRANE

Yes.

HILDA

What did she really say?

MRS. CRANE

I'd rather not talk about it.

HILDA

I often dwell on the scene. Henry and I away on our honeymoon, you sitting by the deathbed, stony-faced, and she cursing you and your daughter with her last breath. And then she expires, and you sit down with pencil and paper and write out those beautiful last words. It was most artistic—I couldn't have done better myself.

MRS. CRANE

Is that what's troubling you?

HILDA

*(Turning to her mother)*

Doesn't it trouble you?

MRS. CRANE

No. Not for one moment. I can face my Maker with a clear conscience, and so can you. . . . I wish you'd take the picture out of the room.

HILDA

I want her here. I'd like some day to look at her and say, "You were wrong. He's happy. You were wrong."

MRS. CRANE

You can do that now.

HILDA

Not quite . . . (*Breaking*) How long do you think I can keep on pretending and pretending? (*Rising and going to the mantel, she idly runs her hand across the set of books there, then turns, her deep bitterness about her mother beginning to take form*) Did you ever read Edna St. Vincent Millay? She's not very fashionable right now, I regret to say, but I've always liked that poem—it ends like this: "With him for a sire and her for a dam, what should I be but just what I am!" It's too lyrical, and perhaps even a trifle quaint, but I like it.

MRS. CRANE

(*Realizing the full danger of HILDA's state*)

This is a very unhappy moment for me.

HILDA

For you?

MRS. CRANE

You're all I have in the world.

HILDA

Since when, Mama?

MRS. CRANE

That's an unwarranted question.

HILDA

Is it?

MRS. CRANE

You're my only child, and in all the years since I lost your father . . .

HILDA

*(Interrupting)*

Mama. You never loved Father.

MRS. CRANE

How dare you say such a thing!

HILDA

You didn't love him. *And you didn't want me.* That's why you had no more children.

MRS. CRANE

That's a lie.

HILDA

I'm not judging you, or accusing you. I'm sure you wanted to love me. (MRS. CRANE *sits rigid, speechless*) But won't I be the same kind of mother to my daughter as you were to me? Her name is Jean, and yet I can't say her name—I can't grant her a personality. I call her the baby, the child. Even when I say "my daughter," it's an act of self-discipline, a reminder . . . (*In great pain*) Suppose she grows up like me, or worse. *Whose fault will it be?* Mine? Yours? Your mother's? (*Studying her mother*) You must have been terribly unhappy with Papa. . . . Maybe he knew it, and that's why he wanted me to be as different as possible from you.

(MRS. CRANE, *suddenly shaking with emotion, rises.*)

MRS. CRANE

(*Picking up hat and gloves from a table*)

I'm going.

## HILDA CRANE

HILDA

*(Without malice or irony)*

Come back some day, won't you?

MRS. CRANE

*(With dignity, at the door)*

I intend to return for supper tonight. Unless you withdraw the invitation.

HILDA

Not at all.

MRS. CRANE

And I don't ever expect you to talk to me again as you have today.

HILDA

You can count on that, Mama. (MRS. CRANE looks at her for a moment in silence, and goes. HILDA stands still for a while. Then she turns and goes quickly to mantel, opens CHARLIE'S book, glances at it, then turns and addresses MRS. OTTWELL'S portrait. With a sharp cry) All right! (She closes book, throws it on sofa and goes quickly to the hall closet, gets a light coat. She calls:) Miss Keavney!

MISS KEAVNEY

*(From upstairs)*

Yes, Mrs. Ottwell?

HILDA

*(Putting on her coat)*

I'm going over to the Bromleys'.

MISS KEAVNEY

*(Her voice coming nearer as she enters)*

Yes, Mrs. Ottwell.

HILDA

I'm going out the back way—it's shorter—and if anyone should drop in, will you say I was unexpectedly called out?  
*(Irrelevantly)* How's the baby—asleep?

MISS KEAVNEY

Yes.

HILDA

*(Hardly hearing her, still indecisive)*

Thank you.

MISS KEAVNEY

Honestly, this house is so practical—I don't see why it needs three servants. I could . . .

HILDA

*(Not hearing her, agitated)*Yes. Thank you *so* much, Miss Keavney.

*(The doorbell rings, a musical chime, and HILDA stops cold.)*

MISS KEAVNEY

*(Hurrying to the door)*

I'll take it.

HILDA

*(Under great tension)*

Wait! . . . Never mind.

## HILDA CRANE

MISS KEAVNEY

*(Eager to be helpful)*

I'll be glad to.

HILDA

*Never mind, Miss Keavney! And thank you.*

MISS KEAVNEY

Yes, Mrs. Ottwell.

*(Somewhat bewildered, MISS KEAVNEY goes upstairs. HILDA stands very still for a moment. Then she drops her coat on a chair at the foot of the stairs, hastens to the front door, opens it. CHARLIE comes in. He has an air of poise and competence he never had before; and his clothes are better.)*

HILDA

Well, well! How nice to see you!

CHARLIE

It's nice to see you too, Hilda.

HILDA

Come in!

CHARLIE

*(Entering slowly)*

Quite a place.

HILDA

Want to have a look?

CHARLIE

Not now, thank you. Looks like an interior decorator's dream.

HILDA

Do you like it?

CHARLIE

Well, I don't know; I have to get used to it. It's not what I expected. . . .

HILDA

(*A little puzzled*)

What could you have expected?

CHARLIE

An informal country place. Early American furniture. You forget that you frequently described your ideal house to me.

HILDA

Well, I love *this* house.

CHARLIE

That's all that matters.

HILDA

(*Speaking rapidly, going to the stairway*)

Would you like to see my baby? She's a year and six weeks old. She has an angelic disposition—just like Henry. (*Comes to him, holding out her hand*) She's asleep now, but we could tiptoe in and . . .

CHARLIE

I'm interested in *you*. Let's have a look. (*He takes her by the shoulders*) Did you ever read that poem I gave you?

HILDA

No. I tore it up and threw it away.

CHARLIE

Too bad. It was a pretty good poem—full of compliments to you.

HILDA

Was it really?

CHARLIE

Oh, yes. It said you were a flower—too fragile to survive unless you could love. It said you might be a great woman with the right man, and less than nothing with the wrong man. And, of course, I was the right man. You see, I felt, and I still feel, that we've been cheated by the Fates, you and I.

HILDA

(*After a slight pause, moving away*)

Shall I get you a drink?

CHARLIE

I've had a couple. I've had three. . . . I didn't want to come here.

HILDA

Would you like to go?

CHARLIE

You know damn well I'm not going.



HILDA  
(*Tensely*)

Charlie, be nice.  
(*Pause.*)

CHARLIE  
(*Sits; he is suddenly the CHARLIE of two years ago, suffering*)  
Yes, I'd like a drink.

HILDA  
(*Promptly*)  
Good! (*She goes to the wall and swings a section of it open, bringing forth a bar*) Scotch and soda?

CHARLIE  
Right.

HILDA  
Henry designed this. I think it's clever, don't you?

CHARLIE  
It certainly is.

HILDA  
We have another room that's a bar all by itself, but we use this more. Isn't that funny?

CHARLIE  
Very.

HILDA  
(*Making the drinks*)  
Did you notice your book is prominently displayed?

## HILDA CRANE

CHARLIE

*(Picking the book up from the sofa)*

I did.

HILDA

I understand you really demonstrate that Shelley was a dreadful little man.

CHARLIE

*(Putting book down)*

“Understand”? Haven’t you read it?

HILDA

*(Embarrassed)*

Well, I . . .

CHARLIE

Were you afraid to? *(HILDA does not answer)* Well, you should. You inspired it.

HILDA

*(Handing him his drink)*

I’m delighted. *(She stands, studying him:)* You’re changed, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Am I?

HILDA

I could tell it the moment I saw you.

CHARLIE

That’s what a few drinks can do.

HILDA

No, it goes deeper than that. You're successful. . . . It must be thrilling to have the old school send for you. It's becoming to you!

CHARLIE

Did I mention that I'm engaged to be married?

HILDA

*(To whom this is a blow; after a slight pause)*

How wonderful!

CHARLIE

*(Getting up, raising his glass)*

Well, here's to your marriage—to your husband, your baby.

HILDA

*(As he drinks)*

Here's to you—to you both. May your life be happy and wonderful—like Henry's and mine.

*(She drinks.)*

CHARLIE

Thank you.

HILDA

*(Sitting on the sofa)*

Tell me about her.

CHARLIE

I'll have a peaceful life with her. *(He goes to the mantel behind the sofa, puts down his glass, moves to the sofa at HILDA's back)* She'll never be what you could have been. But she'll do. *(Almost without inflection)* I want you more than ever. . . .

HILDA

*(Leaning forward away from him, going through an agonizing struggle with herself)*

Is she tall or short, dark or blonde? Oh, I hope she knows what it's taken me such a long time to learn—to give herself to one man and one man only—to make his life her life! Charlie, when I see these women who think they're intelligent, who rush about trying one thing after the other, looking for personal happiness—for the ideal man, or the ideal job . . . *(As she speaks, CHARLIE's hands drop to her shoulders)* Oh, Charlie, today it takes a smart woman, or a lucky woman, to know that the twentieth century has betrayed her, that she can expect nothing from the twentieth century—that she's got to go back to another century.

CHARLIE

*(Kissing the top of her head)*

Yes, Hilda.

HILDA

*(Her voice wavering)*

Charlie, I'm chairman of three committees and a member of two others. . . . I'm busy eight hours a day. And yet I find time to run my home and play with my baby and entertain for my husband.

CHARLIE

*(His face close to hers)*

You're one woman in a million!

HILDA

*(Touching his lapel with an intimate gesture)*

And one thing I beg of you—get into the habit of going to church. I know you don't hold with it much, but when you're





married . . . (CHARLIE *kisses her. As soon as it is over:*) Marriage is a pact with God, Charlie. I hope and pray that your girl has a sense of God. Without it, life is intolerable today, believe me! And have a family. You can't help loving the mother of your children. . . .

(CHARLIE *kisses her again. She goes limp in his arms, trembles. They are interrupted by the door chimes. HILDA remains blindly in his embrace, but CHARLIE straightens up, lifting her to a sitting position, and steps to the mantel and picks up his drink. The door chimes sound again.*)

MISS KEAVNEY

(*Off upstairs, calling:*)

I'm coming!

HILDA

(*Suddenly rising*)

Never mind, Miss Keavney!

(HILDA *starts toward the rear of the house, in a panic, as if to run away, then stops, collects herself with a tremendous effort and goes to open the door.*)

NELL

(*As HILDA opens the door*)

Hi!

HILDA

(*With almost hysterical gaiety*)

Nell! Dink! How sweet of you to drop in! You know Charlie Jensen, don't you?

NELL

*(As she and DINK enter)*

Hello, Charlie.

CHARLIE

How are you, Nell, Dink?

HILDA

*(Too high, too busy)*

Sit down, kids!

NELL

*(She and DINK still standing)*

Can't. We're on our way to the country club. Your mother told us in church this morning that you weren't feeling well. Why aren't you in bed?

HILDA

Oh, I'm fine. And you're going to stay and have a drink!

DINK

We've got a date.

HILDA

Just one drink—it's early. Scotch all around. Am I right?

DINK

Impossible.

NELL

You see, this guy is a prospective customer.

DINK

And we're late now.



HILDA

*(Tense but smiling)*

Bring him here. Telephone and tell him . . .

DINK

*Can't be done.*

HILDA

*(Pleading, frantically, as CHARLIE stands silently and watches)*

Then let him wait! Just stay for one drink, you've got to!

*(She goes to the bar.)*

NELL

We'd love to— *(Slipping her arm through DINK's)* But if Dink can put over this deal, I get a convertible.

HILDA

*(To DINK, desperately, angrily)*

I'm a customer, too! You sold Henry's old house, didn't you? *(Seeing their surprised looks, lowering her voice, shakily)* Charlie and I were having so much fun—we were talking about marriage. And you and Dink are such experts. I was telling Charlie how time solves so many things. Don't you agree, Nell?

NELL

*(Seeing the state HILDA is in)*

I certainly do. . . . I think I'll stay a while. You run along, Dink. *(She sits)* I'll take a taxi and join you.

DINK

Goddamit, this guy and his wife expect us both. Business is business, Hilda.

NELL

Oh, beat it.

DINK

(*To NELL, angrily*)

Don't bother to come to the club. I'll tell my hundred-thousand-dollar prospect that you broke a leg. (*Going to the door, then turning—to HILDA*) Sorry, Hilda, but that's the way it is. So long, Charlie.

CHARLIE

So long, Dink.

(*DINK opens the door.*)

NELL

(*Getting up*)

Oh, Lord. (*Turning to HILDA, as DINK stands with the door open—tenderly*) Maybe we can drop in after supper.

HILDA

(*Going to NELL, taking her by shoulders, sweetly*)

Thank you so much.

NELL

(*Awkwardly*)

Well, we'll call you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Do.

NELL

Bye-bye, dear.

(*They go.*)

HILDA

*(Hurrying to the door and calling after her with great sadness)*

I hope you get that convertible! *(There is silence for a few moments. HILDA closes the door and stands leaning helplessly against it. In a half-whisper)* Where do you want to go, Charlie?

*(CHARLIE crosses over, picks up her coat from the arm-chair, puts the coat on her shoulders. She looks at him deeply a moment, opens the door, straightens and, head up, walks out. CHARLIE follows her, shuts the door.)*

*Curtain*

## ACT THREE

### SCENE II

*The living room as in the preceding scene. It is 4 A.M. the same night. MRS. CRANE, dressed as she was before, is asleep in an armchair. Outside the left window, HILDA appears. She stands looking into the softly lighted room, sees her mother, then she moves out of sight toward the entrance.*

*There is a moment while she lets herself in soundlessly, and then she appears. She is hollow-eyed and pale. She looks in silence at her mother for a moment. The telephone rings. Startled, HILDA disappears quickly up the stairs. MRS. CRANE wakes up and hastens to answer the ringing telephone.*

MRS. CRANE

*(Very alive and concentrated)*

Hello . . . Oh, hello, Nell. You're an angel to call again. No, dear, no word yet. . . . I'm sure it's going to be all right. . . . I don't know where Henry is, but I know he's been keeping in touch with the police. . . . Now, Nell, let's understand each other again: you and Dink were *not here* this afternoon. You did not see Hilda today. You did not see *anybody*. . . . I've already told Henry that I'm sure those New York friends of Hilda's dropped in, and they all went out on a—oh, a party of some sort . . . Now go to bed—it's after four. I'll call you tomorrow. . . . Good night.

*(She hangs up. MISS KEAVNEY, in bathrobe and slippers, comes dashing down the stairs.)*

MISS KEAVNEY

*(Breathlessly)*

Mrs. Crane! Mrs. Crane! She's home! She's right up in the baby's room! She must have come up the back stairs. I went in—I heard a sound—and there she was. Standing in the dark over the baby's crib, talking to the baby. I nearly fainted. She paid no attention to me. . . . She . . . *(She breaks off as HILDA appears at the head of the stairs)* Oh, Mrs. Ottwell! The Lord be praised!

*(HILDA comes downstairs.)*

HILDA

*(In a dead voice, going to the sofa)*

I'm tired. I'd like to sit down.

*(She is still wearing her coat. Her eyes are as dead as her voice.)*

MRS. CRANE

Let me have your coat.

HILDA

No, I'm cold.

*(She sits.)*

MRS. CRANE

You may go, Miss Keavney. And will you telephone the police? They'll get hold of Mr. Ottwell.

MISS KEAVNEY

Yes, ma'am.

*(She goes upstairs. MRS. CRANE and HILDA are alone.)*

## HILDA CRANE

MRS. CRANE

*(Blazing with inner energy)*

Henry may come home any moment. There's much to be said and done. . . . Where were you, Hilda? *(No answer)* Answer me! Were you with Professor Jensen? *(Still no answer)* I went to his apartment myself at ten o'clock. I knocked on the door a long time. Did anybody see you, wherever you were?

HILDA

Mama, may I have a glass of water?

MRS. CRANE

I can't help you unless I know everything. This is obviously in my hands now. *I'll* have to do the talking to Henry. *I'll* have to handle that other man, if necessary. *I'll* have to do your thinking. . . . *Where did you go?*

HILDA

*(Numbly)*

A little country inn . . .

MRS. CRANE

Did anybody see you?

HILDA

*(Turning away)*

May I have a glass of water?

MRS. CRANE

*Did anybody see you?*

HILDA

I don't remember.

MRS. CRANE

Very well. When Henry comes, let me do the talking. You're too tired, is that clear? You need say nothing for a few days. Just listen to me and use your head. Understand?

HILDA

Yes, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

*(After a slight pause)*

Did you stay in that inn?

HILDA

*(Slowly, clearly)*

I committed adultery.

*(Pause.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(Furious and grim)*

What are your intentions?

HILDA

Intentions?

MRS. CRANE

Yours—and his . . .

HILDA

*(Half sitting up)*

Oh, yes . . . His intentions! He *has* intentions! It's all worked out! Every detail! While Henry is at the factory, you see, we can meet. We'll have a signal code! If I call him and say, "No, Professor, I don't like chapter three of your book," that means I can't meet him at three o'clock. *(Turning away)*

*from her mother with quiet horror*) He—he's clever—like you . . . He said, "You have to cheat a little if you're going to survive." Well, tonight I cheated. Or was it two years ago that I cheated—on my wedding night?

MRS. CRANE

*(With utter finality)*

You are never to see him again.

HILDA

*(Her mind far away)*

Yes, Mama.

MRS. CRANE

I don't intend to let you out of my sight.

HILDA

You— *(Turning toward MRS. OTTWELL'S portrait)* and she. *(Rising and facing the portrait)* She was there, you see. *(Turning—in a clear, far-away voice)* It was a pleasant place. Brookside Manor. About fifty miles from here. He registered as Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis, while I sat outside in the car. And then he brought me up the back way. I've never sneaked into a place before. *(Suddenly, with an odd lift in her voice)* Do you know what I'm like, Mama? *(Holding out both hands, smiling, eyes glowing)* I drank, and I talked, and laughed, as I haven't done in a long—*(Her voice breaks and her face grimaces with suffering)* long time . . . *(She sobs violently, turning and clinging to the mantel, and weeps helplessly for a while. Then, drying her eyes, facing her mother)* Afterward we had supper—the three of us. That's when *she* came in. . . . I didn't mind. I told them the story of my life—the whole story. Everything. Mama, I've had a life. I didn't do much with it, but I had it. . . . Do you know, I was rather sweet at fifteen? I



wanted to have a beautiful heart and a beautiful mind. (*She speaks rapidly, her voice almost out of control*) I wanted to give to some wonderful husband, to a large family of children. I wanted to be Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale. (*She glances at the portrait bitterly*) She didn't believe a word of it. . . . Charlie was understanding and tender. But in the end they got together. (*She returns to the sofa*) Charlie said it so sweetly, Mama, so gently, and with admiration. . . . He said, "All that's the matter with you, darling Hilda, is that you're a classic figure and don't know it. You're a courtesan." And she shook her head and said, "Don't let him kid you—you're a whore." That's when Charlie began to make such clever plans. . . . (*Staring at her mother*) Mama! You agree with them, don't you! You agree with them! But it isn't true! (*Bending over in her pain*) I'm a woman, so help me God! A failure, hopelessly wrong, but I've been struggling all my life to be a woman—not a courtesan, not a—tramp . . . Answer me! Acknowledge me!

MRS. CRANE

Where will I get the strength to live through this? . . .

HILDA

(*Staring at her mother, in a whisper*)

Poor Mama . . . You're having a bad night, aren't you? (*With childlike wistfulness*) Do you—perhaps—love me . . . ?

MRS. CRANE

(*Bitterly*)

No, I don't love you. (*HILDA turns away with a dazed, crazy little smile*) But you're my daughter, and I live in this town. And there's nowhere else for *you* to live. And we're both going to stay here the rest of our lives. We can't do that unless we're able to hold our heads up.

HILDA

Oh, Mama! Oh, Mama! (*She begins to laugh*) We're having another one of our heart-to-heart talks, aren't we?

(*She breaks into great sobs of laughter which she cannot control. She clutches the cushion on the sofa and tries to stifle her hysteria. MRS. CRANE steps over, takes the cushion from her.*)

MRS. CRANE

(*Placing the cushion neatly back in its place*)

I'll get you that glass of water.

HILDA

(*Still laughing*)

Yes, Mama! (*As her mother goes; like a child in the dark, her arm frantically reaching after the departing figure*) Mama! Mama! (*After a few moments her hysteria subsides. Breathing hard, she rises, takes a small bottle full of pills from her coat pocket. She opens the bottle, pours the pills into her left hand, corks the bottle, puts it in her pocket. She watches the doorway through which her mother left. She looks at the pills in her hand, closes her fist about them, slips her hand into her coat pocket. As her mother comes with the water, HILDA is sitting on the sofa again*) Thank you, Mother. (*MRS. CRANE hands her the glass of water*) I'm terribly tired. I want to sleep downstairs tonight—right here. Tell Henry. He won't mind.

MRS. CRANE

Very well.

HILDA

(*Hand still in pocket—cunningly*)

Mama, will you please draw the curtains?

(*MRS. CRANE goes to the window and draws the great*

*curtains. As soon as her back is turned, HILDA quickly swallows half of the pills, takes some water, swallows the rest of the pills, and has finished the glass of water when her mother turns. HILDA looks blankly at the empty palm of the hand which held the pills.)*

MRS. CRANE

*(Sitting, her tone less severe)*

You'll get over this. You might even take an occasional trip away from Henry.

HILDA

Come and live here, will you?

MRS. CRANE

I intend to.

HILDA

I want the baby brought up your way. Then she'll survive. *(HILDA stretches out on the sofa, her head on the cushion)* She might even be happy.

MRS. CRANE

*(Proudly, sternly)*

Yes, she will. *(MRS. CRANE suddenly sits forward, alert and listening, rises and hurries to open the door. HENRY comes in, haggard, slow)* She's all right, Henry! Absolutely all right! And it was just as I expected. Those people from New York—they dropped in . . .

HENRY

*(Grimly)*

Don't, Mama Crane. *(HILDA is watching him)* I know what happened. *(HILDA covers her eyes with her hand. MRS. CRANE is*

*speechless*) I've just been talking to Professor Jensen. (*As he moves heavily to the sofa*) I've been thinking about everything very deeply. I was always afraid something like this might happen. (*Facing HILDA*) I have only one question to ask: Are you sorry for what you did?

HILDA

(*Numbly*)

Yes.

HENRY

(*Sits at her feet*)

You know I love you, don't you?

HILDA

Yes.

HENRY

I want to forgive you. Will you look down on me if I forgive you?

HILDA

(*Pitifully*)

I'll be grateful to you—forever. . . .

HENRY

You won't do anything like this again, will you?

HILDA

(*Tears in her eyes*)

I won't.

HENRY

Because I don't think I could stand it.

HILDA

*(Half-rising, hand outstretched toward him in a final futile effort to comfort him, then lying back, face hopelessly turned away)*

I know, Henry, I know.

MRS. CRANE

*(Quietly)*

Leave her here with me, Henry.

HENRY

*(Rising)*

Yes. *(He goes to the stairs, stops)* Okay.

MRS. CRANE

You've behaved with great understanding.

HENRY

Well, good night.

MRS. CRANE

Good night, Henry. *(HENRY goes upstairs, sadly and solidly. MRS. CRANE moves toward HILDA)* You're a very lucky woman. . . . You've got everything.

HILDA

*(Very sleepily)*

Everything—everything.

MRS. CRANE

*(After a pause)*

I'm going up to bed. *(She crosses to the stairs, stops and turns out the lights in the room, and only the faint streaks of dawn fall through the one big uncurtained window onto*

HILDA's *couch. She goes up the stairs, pauses in the light of an unseen upper lamp*) Is there anything you want? Shall I get you a blanket?

HILDA

*(Even more sleepily)*

No, just this coat. This coat—this dress . . .

MRS. CRANE

*(At the head of the stairs)*

Good night, Hilda.

*(She goes. The upstairs light goes out.)*

HILDA

*(Almost inarticulately)*

Good-bye, Mama.

*(The dawn dimly illumines the sleeping HILDA on the sofa.)*

*Curtain*







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